DADDY DAN

MARY T. WAGGAMAN



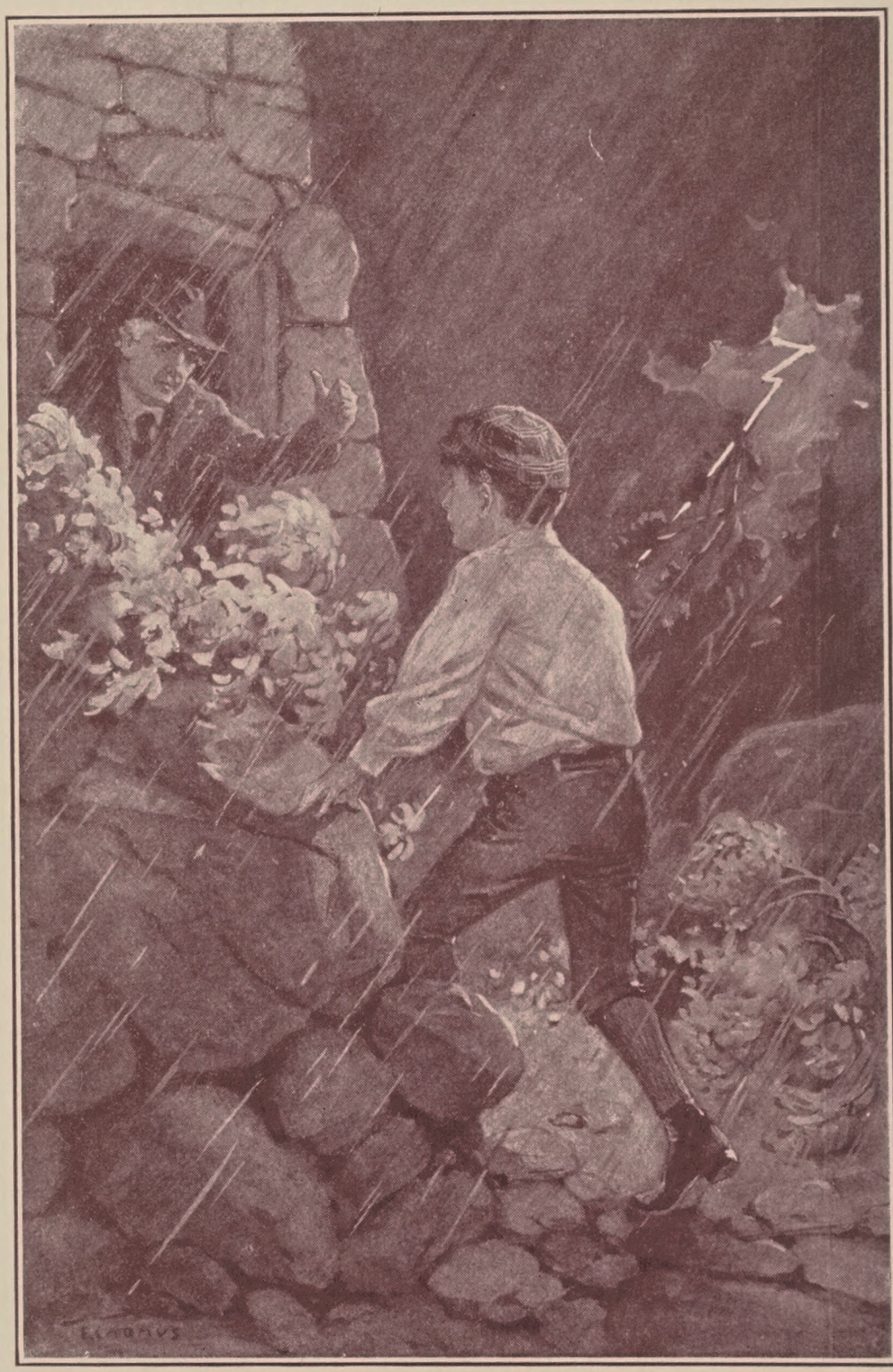
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DADDY DAN



"'COME IN!' SHOUTED THE OLD MAN OVER THE DIN OF THE TEMPEST."—(*Page 20.*)

DADDY DAN

BY

MARY T. WAGGAMAN
AUTHOR OF "THE PLAYWATER PLOT," "NAN NOBODY,"
"LITTLE MISSY," ETC.



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DADDY DAN

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CHAPTER I

NEDDY

"Only three days more!"

Swinging on the big barnyard gate, Neddy Ray made the woeful calculation. Only three days more at Valley Farm.

Three days more of such glad, free, wide life as his thirteen city-bound years had never known.

Three days more to ride the farm horses down to creek and smithy, to drive the sleek cows home through the clover fields, to hunt eggs in the sweet-smelling hay.

Three days more with Jim and Dave, and Dick and Towser, with the brindled calf that had arrived just a week before him,

and the new chickens that had clipped the shell under his wondering eye.

Three days more of unstinted cream and porridge — home-made bread, thick with home-made honey, fried chicken, and apple pie.

And then — then — back to the great Capital City that lay hazy under the September sunshine fifty miles away, back to the big, crowded department store, where he sat all day in a little cage wrapping bundles for busy shoppers — back — ah, there was glad compensation in that — back to little Mama and the three tiny rooms they called home.

For one hot summer noon, when the department store was very crowded, and the air in his little cage heavy and still, the gay, busy scene had suddenly whirled round in a dizzy dance and turned black before Neddy's eyes, and he had dropped — a little limp, senseless picket at his post.

There had been a long, queer time, when

he had seemed to be whirling madly over the shining stretches of the cash railway, tangled in yards of ribbon and held in meshes of lace, while Miss Marling's call of "Quick, please, Neddy!" echoed in his ears and he could not find paper or twine to do his work.

And then he had wakened in the cool, dim ward of a hospital, where Mama was crying softly by his little cot, and Sister Francesca holding ice to his head, and telling her all was right now, the crisis was past.

And then after another long, quiet time that seemed all jelly and broth and — other tantalizing girl goodies — when he could have picked a Christmas turkey to its bones, the doctors had sent him to Valley Farm for a whole month — a wonderful month, whose passing hours Neddy was sadly counting now —

"Hi, there!" called black Jim, as he came loaded with harness from the big

stables, "too fine a day for gate-swinging, little Marse. Better get out dem crooked pins ob yurn and scuttle down ter de river. Uncle Si says the fish is biting like fleas long Roper's Rocks."

"Oh, yes, come please, won't you, Jim?" was the eager reply.

"Wisht I could," said Jim woefully. "Got der ile all dis harness and clar out de cribs, and do no end of things.

"Ole man a roarin' bout keeping a lot ob lazy niggahs eating dar heads off and swears we'll have to stir lively or quit. Why don't you hoof it off by your own self, little Marse?"

"I, I can't," answered Ned. "Mrs. Burroughs said I must not go fish in the rocks alone. I can't swim, you know, and it isn't safe."

"Dat's so," said Jim. "De current down dar runs like a mill stream shuah, and dem rocks as slippery as if dey wus greased. I tell you what's nex' bes',

though, Marse Ned. Peek-a-boo is thick with fox grapes and the women folks is giving cash down de bucket fur em. You kin make a dollar easy if you'll cut long right now 'fore all de little niggahs lets loose on 'em."

"Oh, can I?" said Ned eagerly. "I would like to make a dollar, Jim, to take a present home to Mama. I am going on Thursday, you know, and a dollar would buy something nice — don't you think it would, Jim?"

"You bet it would," answered Jim emphatically; "you kin get a diamond breast pin at Hooker's for half the money —"

"Oh, but she wouldn't like that," answered Ned, whose commercial life had made him wise in the ways of womankind. "But I could stop at the store on my way home and buy her a pretty neckpiece or handkerchief or comb. My Mama is pretty — pretty and young, yet, Jim, though she dresses in black all the time."

"A widdy woman, I guess," hazarded Jim.

"Yes," answered Ned, "my papa died when I was only eight years old."

"Had time nuff to get you another," grinned Jim.

But Ned's little freckled face flushed at the word.

"Oh, she wouldn't — she'll never do that," he answered quickly. "We don't want another — neither Mama nor I. I'll be grown up pretty soon, and then I'll do all the work, and Mama can stop sewing and rest —"

"You'd better start bisness in the fox grapes right now," said Jim, showing his white teeth in a friendly smile.

"I will," answered Neddy eagerly, "I'll get a bucket from Mrs. Burroughs, and start right away. What do fox grapes look like, Jim?"

"Lor'!" exclaimed Jim, staring at the little figure — trig and trim even in the

well-worn blue serge suit that showed in mud and grass stains it had been indeed a holiday garb. "You *is* city-rigged shuah. Fox grapes! why they look like grapes and nuthing else. It's well thar ain't no pison blueberries round, or you'd want a keeper, but thar ain't nuthing but grapes in sight now 'cept poke and sumac, and I reckon you ain't dumb nuff to pick them. You needn't go bother folks at the house. I kin let you have a tin bucket heah."

And armed with the light if somewhat rusty pail Jim brought from the stable, Ned was soon crossing the wide stretch of meadow on his way to Peek-a-boo that, veiled in soft blue haze, rose steep and high above the valley.

"Peak Renien" was the true name given to this mountain height during the war, from its wide, sweeping outlook over the surrounding country; "Peek-a-boo," the cognomen to which darkey dialect had reduced it in these latter years, when remote

from all roadways it had lapsed into a fierce frowning strength that seemed to forbid approach. Wooded heavily with pine and cedar, tangled with brier and vine, it rose above the valley, its sharp summit veiled in a blue haze as if the smoke of bygone camp fires still lingered there,— fires that flared into angry flames when the mountain tempest gathered and the war of olden battle seemed again to thunder down the shaking rocks. Eerie stories from those dark days still hung like the battle smoke about Peek-a-boo, ghostly riders were said to gather in its midnight shadows, strange signal lights to flash from its gloomy height, old camp songs to echo through its silence.

But these were only terrors of the night — with the coming of twilight Peek-a-boo veiled itself in silvery mists, and became a dim, spectral cloudland, mysterious and inaccessible, but with the golden September sunshine bright upon its frowning brow, its heavy sides wreathed with scarlet creepers,

the breeze sweeping through its pines sweet with the perfume of purpling grapes, old Peek-a-boo had a charm that banished all thoughts of fear.

So it was without any hesitation that Ned clambered up the rugged path, looking in vain for the plentiful crop which was to fill his pail and buy little Mother's holiday present, but alas! Jim's friendly tip had been given too late — every vine was stripped bare.

And straggling down the mountain side, their battered pails and pans brimming with purple fruit, came three, four, five, bare-legged little pickaninnies led by Uncle Si's twelve-year-old Josh, as keen-eyed a speculator as ever cornered a grape market.

"Gee whitakins!" exclaimed Ned in dismay. "You've got them all, haven't you?" Josh paused, a glint of triumph in his eyes, as he surveyed the eager face, the empty pail of his hopeless competitor.

"Looks lak we had," he answered;

"we's stripped dis heah ground shuah. You see, Mam, she's cook up to Judge Trumel's, and dey's putting up jelly. So we sot off at sun-up dis mawning to get all we could. You be a looking for grapes, too?"

"Yes," answered Ned disappointedly, "but there's no use — you haven't left any."

"Dunno 'bout dat," said Josh reflectively. "Spec thar's plenty more up higher. Dese here chillun clear done tired, so we got to go home, but ef you hev a mind to climb de rocks, you'll find plenty grapes, up de top."

"Is it very far?" asked Neddy, who since his month of whirl in the cash railway had not quite his usual nimble strength.

"Wal, it ain't fur zackly, but it's tol'able high," said Josh, "more'n these heah chillun could climb, so we didn't try it."

"Oh, then, I will," said Ned, cheered by

the thought of untouched harvest. "I'm not afraid of climbing if that's all."

"Ye kin try it," said Josh doubtfully, "But you'd best move quick. Thar's a big black cloud down ter de Gap and Peek-a-boo ain't no good place in a storm. We'se gwine home. You, Luella Jane! What you mean by tipping over your pan of grapes like that an' a wasting good money. Go long now, Thomas Jefferson, you all make tracks from dis mountain quick, for de ole man is a growling. He'll come down and cotch you." And hurrying his straggling flock away, Josh left Neddy to face the situation alone.

For a moment he hesitated, considering the parting warning, and then — well, Neddy had not been perched above a bargain counter for eighteen months without learning that there are tricks in any trade. Josh was trying to scare him off — that was plain. And resolving that if the grapes were on the mountain top he would

not go back with an empty pail, Ned kept steadily on his way, despite the low mutterings that reached his ear as he clambered up the rocky path that seemed to grow steeper and rougher at every step, until it vanished utterly in a great heap of moss-grown boulders, ruins of an old fortification that had once guarded the mountain pass. But there are soldiers now as there were then, and our Neddy was following the flag of love up these frowning heights to-day even though his only arms were a brave heart and a rusty pail. So he scrambled up the old redoubt heedless of the vicious thornbush that caught his sleeve and the sharp stones that scraped his shin.

But old "Peek-a-boo" in angry mood was not to be braved so defiantly.

Just as our little soldier reached the last big rock of the crumbling wall, a blinding flash lit the sky, and with the roar of a hundred batteries the swift mountain tempest was upon him.

The flash and crash were too much for Neddy; he lost his slippery footing, his pail tumbled one way and he rolled down in blackness, and roar and flooding rain, he did not know where —

"Thunder and lightning!" shouted a deep, hoarse voice that made him scramble up to his feet in new terror. "Who the blazes are you?"

CHAPTER II

A STORMY VISIT

Neddy could only stare dumbly at the speaker, a tall, gaunt, grizzled man in a rough grey suit and shabby slouch hat, beneath which a pair of keen, dark eyes flashed fiercely under shaggy brows.

All the stories he had ever heard of the spirits of Peek-a-boo seemed to take shape and form before our hero's startled gaze. For really in this awful gloom, lit only by the glare of the lightning, with the thunder crashing in deafening peals from peak to peak, it would have been no wonder if the restless old ghosts that held Peek-a-boo in the darkness should awake.

"Come in!" shouted the old man over the din of the tempest. "Are you deaf, dumb or blind, you young idiot? Come in,

say, out of the storm, before you're killed outright."

And the bewildered boy was jerked forward into the open door of an old cabin, that hidden in vines and bushes, had escaped his eye.

"George! you're white," said Neddy's host as he slammed and bolted the door against the rain. "Here, drink this," and he poured something from a big bottle. "That was a pretty tall tumble you had. Are you hurt?"

"No — no — sir," stammered Neddy, his breath nearly taken by the fiery draught he had gulped down. "I'm — not — hurt at all."

"It would have served you right if you had broken your neck — hunting me out like this — you're from Washington, I know."

The keen eyes flashed fiercely at Neddy.

"Ye — yes, sir," was the astonished answer.

"Didn't you hear that I had sworn that if anybody followed me up here I'd shoot him on sight?"

"Sir!" gasped Neddy, quite incapable of further speech.

"Well, I did. I swore that very thing. I tell you, young man, you'd better have tackled a bear or a wild cat in its mountain den. If you hadn't tumbled down nearly dead, as I thought, at my feet, I don't know what I would have done. As it is — as it is — well, out with your business. What do you bring?"

"N — n — nothing, sir," stammered Neddy, who between the crash of the storm outside and this alarming old man within felt that half Peek-a-boo's terrors had been untold.

"Nothing!" echoed his companion, while an awful clap of thunder seemed to emphasize his word, "Nothing! Oh, it's too late to back out now, young man. Turn out your pockets. Lord, no bag!" as with

a shaking hand Ned proceeded to obey and jackknife, marbles, crooked nails, pennies rattled down on the floor. "I want your papers, your papers."

"I — I — haven't any, sir," gasped the frightened boy.

"You haven't any?" shouted his host above the thunder peal that shook the rocks. "Do you mean you've lost them, you young scoundrel? Where, when, how? speak out quick; quick or I can't keep my hands off you. Good Lord! you don't know what mischief you may have done, boy — scattering my private papers over the country. Where did you miss them — when?" And the speaker caught Neddy by the shoulder fiercely.

"Let me go," cried the boy desperately, "let me go, I tell you. I haven't your papers. I never had them. I don't know what you're talking about. I came up here to-day looking for — for fox grapes."

"Fox grapes!" roared Neddy's compan-

ion in a fresh outburst, "fox grapes! Why, you lying young reprobate, didn't you tell me just now you came from Washington. Aren't you a District Messenger boy?"

"No, I'm not, I'm not — I'm a bundle-wrapper at Roreham's Department Store and I've been at Valley Farm for a month. And I would not tell a lie for the whole world," continued Neddy, honest indignation mastering all fears. "I did come up here just to gather fox grapes."

"Fox grapes! fox grapes!" — the old man stared for a moment at the small speaker and then, to Neddy's new terror, sank back in a camp chair and seemed to go off into a fit. He coughed, choked, spluttered and sneezed, stamping and swearing between times ferociously.

Speechless with fright, Neddy was making a break for the door when he was caught in a grip of steel.

"Don't," gasped his terrifying companion, "wait, wait, until I get my breath;

laughing always sets me off like this. Don't run, boy; you'll get drowned out in that flood.

"Fox grapes — oh, Lord — and I thought, I thought — confound this hay fever! I'd rather be dead outright."

"Fever!" Neddy caught the familiar word and felt he understood — The poor man was ill, delirious, perhaps, even as he had been a little while ago.

"Oh, have you the fever?" he asked sympathetically.

"Have I got it? Thunderation, no," answered his companion as another sneezing fit struck him. "The durned thing has got *me* — kerchoo — kerchoo — kerchoo — hand me that bottle, Sonny. I'll have to stop this if I kill myself —"

"Oh, no — no," said Neddy in alarm, "you mustn't, indeed you mustn't. I've had the fever very bad myself, and know — you ought not to take medicine yourself. You ought to have a doctor — or go to the hos-

pital. They'll take you in there and treat you fine."

"They will, eh?" was the grim rejoinder.

"*Fine,*" repeated his young adviser. "Give you a nice bed, and ice bags, and broth, and jelly, and everything you want, and they won't charge you a cent."

"They won't, eh?" There was an odd twinkle in the old man's keen eye. "Are you quite sure of that?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure, when people are — are poor, you know," continued Ned, with a quick glance around the bare little cabin. "And you'd better go as soon as you can. I'm afraid, I'm really afraid"— the young speaker hesitated about giving so alarming an opinion — "that — that you'll never get well up here alone."

"I'm beginning to think the same thing myself. Though I've heard that for hay fever there isn't a better place."

"*Hay* fever!" repeated Ned. "'Oh, I don't know anything about that. I didn't

have hay fever. Is it as bad as typhoid?"

"Worse, a thousand times worse. I'd rather have typhoid, cholera, smallpox, and bubonic plague all rolled into a bunch. It's one of those low, sneaking, pestiferous things that are too mean to kill a fellow outright, but just keep him swearing because he isn't dead."

"But, the doctor, if you had a doctor," said Ned — whose faith in those skilful friends was firm.

"Blast the doctors!" said the other, though there was a humorous twitch about the corners of his mouth. "I'm up here to get rid of them — I'm up here to fight it out myself. I am going higher to-morrow. If mountain air is what I want, I'll get it, if I have to climb to the clouds. Sit down now, and let's make friends. This consarned sneezing has eased off, and I can be civil. I gave you a rough welcome — but I thought you were trying some trick on me. You said you were from the Capital

you see — and — and — well, I know something of the youngsters there. They're sharpers I tell you — skin you with their eyes shut."

"That's mean," said Neddy, "dirty mean. How did they skin you?"

"Oh, I didn't say they had — I said they would if they could — know it from past experience. But you're not that pattern, I'm sure."

"No, I'm not," answered Neddy; "I wouldn't skin anybody, especially —" He hesitated, but his companion concluded the sentence — "such a poor old shaky fellow as me. But they try it, my boy, they try it. That's one reason I like to get off on the mountain top. There are no skin games here."

"But you don't live here always — all alone?" said Neddy in dismay.

"Well, no, not always," was the answer, "not always. When the weather gets wintry, I generally hang around town

somewhere and do a little work to keep me warm."

"Oh, I'm sorry — I mean that's an awful sad way to live," said Neddy. "Mama and I are poor, too, but we've got three nice little rooms with ruffled curtains to the windows, and a couch with pretty pillows that turns into a bed at night and a nice little gas stove to cook on and three pots of geraniums and a rocking chair and lots of things. If I get a raise Christmas — I'm pretty sure of one — I mean to buy a rug. I can get one on the installment plan for fifty cents a week."

"Do you mean that you, *you* run this establishment alone?" asked the old man, his keen eyes softening strangely as he looked at the small figure on the old camp chair at his side. "Where is your father?"

"Oh, he is dead," answered Neddy sadly; "he has been dead a long time — five years. And he didn't leave us any money, so Mama came to Washington to get a government

office. But she couldn't pass the examination."

"Oh, she couldn't, eh?" and there was an odd gleam in the speaker's eye.

"For she got nervous, I guess," continued Neddy gravely. "Because my Mama knows a lot. She teaches me at night since I've stopped going to school. But she couldn't remember about Chapultepec or the Bay of Funday, or who fought the battle of Stony Point — and things that I know myself. Poor little Mama! She cried all night about it. And then Mrs. Ross got her work from Roreham's and she has been doing Infant Outfits ever since."

"What kind of fits?" asked Neddy's companion perplexedly.

"Baby clothes, you know; she makes them fine," answered Neddy. "Sometimes she gets seven dollars a week."

"Seven dollars — good Lord!"

"But she can't do that now," continued

Neddy, who hadn't had such a chance to talk of home and mother for four whole weeks; "her eyes began to hurt so, the doctor said she mustn't sew at night, so I had to stop school and go to work. Roreham gave me a place as bundle boy, at twelve dollars a month —"

"Kerchoo — kerchoo —" the hay fever caught Neddy's hearer quite viciously.

"Come out, my boy," he said huskily, "come out into the air. The durned thing has got me again. The storm is over, I think, and — Billy, Johnny, what did you say your name was?"

"Neddy, sir — Edward Wharton Ray," was the answer.

"A good name, a first-rate name. Shake hands on it, my boy, Mr. Edward Wharton Ray, you are a brick — the good old-fashioned brick needed to build things up straight and square in these shaky days. Let's get out of this dark hole, into the sunshine together."

The speaker pushed open the cabin door just in time to prevent another fit of sneezing and they stepped out on a wide porch, canopied with interlacing vines.

CHAPTER III

DADDY DAN

Neddy could scarce believe his own eyes, so swift and sudden had been the change.

The darkness had lifted; the black storm clouds torn into jags and tatters, were sweeping down the valley, and Peek-a-boo was laughing in the sunshine again.

And Neddy's new friend seemed to have changed like the mountain. The frown was gone from his shaggy brow, the flash of the keen eyes had softened, the rugged face had grown friendly and kind. And, jeweled with raindrops, the grape vines tangled and twisted from rock to rock, heavy with purple fruit.

"Gee whiz! look at them," said Neddy breathlessly. "If I only had my pail!

But I dropped it when I tumbled down here."

"Let us see if we can't find something that will do as well." And turning back into the cabin, the old man brought out a basket. "We'll clear this out first and then go for grapes to fill it. I don't know how you feel, but I am hungry as a mountain bear."

And though Neddy had done full justice to a good dinner before he started on his quest, the sight of that open basket made him hungry, too. It was such a remarkable basket to have found its way up here. Wide and deep and strong, and packed with all sorts of good things: cold chicken, and ham sandwiches, brown bread and cheese, and pickles, a jar of sweet ginger, a bottle of wine.

"Help yourself," said Neddy's host, sitting down on the flat log that served as doorstep. "Don't be afraid; I'm off tonight and don't want to carry all this grub

with me, so we may as well lick things clean."

And after his climb, his fright, his general stirring up, Neddy was sharp set enough to need no second invitation. Chicken sandwiches, brown bread, vanished as only a boy who has to even up for six weeks of fever diet can make things vanish, while his new friend, who couldn't begin to keep up with his guest, looked on — a friendly twinkle in his deep-set eyes.

"Nothing like mountain air to give a chap an appetite," he said; "have a drop of the wine now? No? That's right — you don't need it — I do."

"Oh, no, I don't want another thing, thank you — Mr. — Mr. — you haven't told me your name yet," said Neddy, looking up at his host inquiringly.

"My name?" repeated the old man. "Names don't count much here on the mountain top; one is about as good as the

other. But where I come from folks call me Daddy Dan."

"Daddy Dan!" echoed Neddy. "Daddy! But that isn't — isn't a real name — it's just fun."

"I suppose it was just fun at first, you know. But —" the speaker had drawn out a pipe and was filling it from a leather bag — "after a while I learned to like it. To a lonely old fellow without anybody to care for it sounds sort of friendly and sociable."

"I guess it does," said Neddy softly, as if he understood.

"So I stick to it," said Daddy Dan, as he scratched a match and puffed his pipe into glow, "or, rather, the name sticks to me."

There was a moment's pause, during which Neddy looked up into the smoker's face with a new sympathy.

"And didn't — didn't you ever have a wife or children or — or anybody?" he asked hesitatingly. Again there was

silence while Daddy Dan stared through his smoke at the little thin hand that had stolen up on his knee.

"Yes," he answered at last. "I had once a long time ago. But don't you ever marry a girl until you know how to take care of her and have money enough to do it right. I took my little girl off to the woods and expected her to rough it with me, Sonny, and she couldn't do it; she tried hard but she couldn't and she and her baby died. That — that sort of broke me up, Sonny, and I've fought shy of women folks ever since. Come," said Daddy Dan with an abrupt change of tone, as he shook the ashes from his pipe, "let us take our basket now and go after the fox grapes."

And they went over the sunlit heights, Daddy Dan leading, by ways that Josh and his little crew could never reach. Wild, sweet ways they were, where the grapes grew thick and ripe and the scarlet plumes of the sumach were waving, and Autumn

was already flaunting her conquering banners of crimson and gold.

Daring ways — that Neddy would never have ventured alone; around the sharp, rocky crest where old Peek-a-boo went sheer down a hundred feet below the narrow bridle path, across the mountain streamlet bridged only by a single log, down the dark, rocky stairway of the gorge, where the waterfall took three foaming tumbles that sent its waters ice-cold into the valley.

Reckless ways indeed they were to our little bundle boy, but Daddy Dan led — and wherever Daddy Dan led people followed even though the paths were steeper and rockier than the heights of Peek-a-boo. For they felt as Neddy did to-day that the keen eye, the strong arm, the steady hand of their guide could never fail.

And when at last, their basket heaped with grapes, Daddy Dan and his little friend reached the lower ridge, the sun was

sinking in the mountain gap, and old Peek-a-boo's shining heights had vanished into cloud and mist again.

"There's your road," said Daddy Dan, pointing to the beaten track that led down to the valley. "Better take your grapes, and skip along so as to be home before dark, or folks will begin to worry about you."

"I am afraid they will," said Ned, "I didn't know it was so late. Gee! I've had a fine time with you, Daddy Dan; I'll never forget it. And thank you ever so much for helping me to pick the grapes. I'll get nearly a dollar for them, I guess, there's such a lot."

"Going to sell them are you?" asked Daddy Dan gruffly. "I thought you were getting them to take to your mother."

"Oh, no! She wouldn't want all these," explained Neddy. "And we can't afford to put up jelly. It takes too much sugar. I'll sell them, so I can buy a little present

for Mama — a collar or handkerchief or something pretty. And to-morrow I'll bring you back the basket and your half of the money."

"My half of the money!" echoed Daddy Dan.

"Why, yes, half the grapes belong to you," said Neddy simply.

"Oh, I see, I see," said Daddy Dan, "but you needn't bother. Take my share to your mother, too, with my compliments. And you may as well keep the basket, too — I'll be gone to-morrow."

"Oh, will you?" asked Neddy ruefully. "I'm sorry."

"Want another grape hunt, eh?" a kindly smile hovering about the lips.

"Yes, I do — I never had a nicer time in my life. And I like you, too. But I'm going home myself on Thursday and I'm afraid I'll never see you again unless — unless," and Neddy's face brightened, "you could come to see me in town."

"I might — if you'd like to have me," said Daddy Dan.

"Oh, I would," said Neddy eagerly, "and Mama would, too. She is always glad to see my friends. And — and if you haven't any place to go, we've always got a nice, warm fire to sit by, and Mama will make you a hot cup of tea. And," the speaker's blue eyes brightened with further possibilities, "I know Griggs, the shipping clerk at Roreham's, real well. You might get a job when the holiday season comes on his wagons."

"Think you've got the pull to put me in there, eh?" said Daddy Dan, who stood knitting his shaggy brows against the glow of the sunset, a suggestion of a smile again lighting up the rather grim countenance.

"Oh, I don't know, I can't promise, but I'll try to do all I can. Griggs is a good fellow to work for and he would give you five dollars a week."

"Five dollars a week!" repeated Daddy

Dan, nodding. "I've had worse offers, Sonny. I'll think about it."

"But you'll find the warm seat by the fire and cup of tea sure, anyhow, Daddy Dan. If I had a piece of paper," continued Neddy, diving into his pocket, "I'd write down our address."

"Put it here," said his new friend, pulling off a bit of birch bark from the tree beside him. "That's the sort of card for you and me, Sonny." And taking out his stubby bit of pencil, Neddy wrote,

EDWARD WHARTON RAY,
115 BLANK ST.,
THIRD FLOOR BACK.

"You just walk up and knock," he explained. "It's a dollar more a month rent, you see, when the girl answers the bell, and there's no use in paying all that just for style."

"Not a bit," answered Daddy Dan heartily.

"Come any time, only I am not home until after six," Neddy continued, with hospitable eagerness. "But Mama will be glad to see you, and you need not mind dressing up or anything like that, you know, for us. Come just as you are now."

"I will," replied Daddy Dan, as his big brown hand closed over Neddy's in a parting grip, "I'll look you up, Sonny, sure."

. . . . . .

"Land sakes!" cried good Mrs. Burroughs as in the last glow of the sunset Neddy appeared at the kitchen door with his basket of grapes, "I've been that worried about you, child, I couldn't eat a bite of supper and was just going to send out some of the men to look you up. Where hev you been?"

"Up on the mountain top getting grapes," was the gleeful answer.

"Lord, I should say you hed," exclaimed the good woman as she looked at the burden Neddy deposited on the kitchen table.

"A little city chap like you to get all them! I thought you would have been skeered to death in the storm. You got wet to the skin, I'll be bound, and like as not will be down with pneumony to-morrow."

"Oh, no, I won't. I didn't get wet at all. I met the nicest kind of an old man up on the mountain; he took me in and gave me lunch, and helped me to gather the grapes, and we had a fine time together. Maybe you know him. He is called Daddy Dan."

"Daddy Dan!" repeated Mrs. Burroughs. "That ain't no sort of Christian name for anybody, child. Was he black or white?"

"Oh, white," replied Neddy, "or rather a sort of nice brown, like he had been sunburned, you know."

"And where did you say you met him?" asked Mrs. Burroughs curiously.

"Up there on Peek-a-boo, behind the pile of rocks. He was in a little cabin

up there in the mountain — a dear little cabin!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the startled woman, "don't tell me, child, you've been up to Rifle Rocks and in that hanted hut where no living critter has set foot this five years. Burroughs! Burroughs!" the good wife hailed her husband, who was smoking comfortably on the kitchen porch, "where do you think this boy has been? Up in the old moonshiner's hut on the mountain, where Bill Dolan was shot five years ago and nobody has dared to live ever since. Says he met an old man up there that calls himself Daddy Dan. Ever hear of sich a person, Burroughs?"

"No," growled Burroughs, "where would I hear of any such critter? I ain't going round looking fur trouble. Some rascal up there hiding from the sheriff, I reckon. Better keep clear of him, lad," continued the farmer in a kinder tone to Neddy.

"Folks that roost on the rocks a-top of Peek-a-boo ain't there for no good."

"Oh, but this, this was a real kind, nice old man, Mr. Burroughs," said Neddy warmly.

"Kind! nice!" chuckled Mr. Burroughs grimly. "Them's the worst sort of rascals, I've allus found, the very worst kind. Why, old Bill Dolan that was killed up thar fighting the revenue officers uster lead the mourners at revival meetings, and looked like the pictur of Moses holding the tables of the law."

"You don't know what sort of a desperate rascal that old chap may be. Best give him a wide berth if you ever see him again, my boy, a very wide berth."

"Oh, I can't believe he is bad, Mr. Burroughs," said Neddy eagerly. "I just can't. Daddy Dan may be in trouble up there, but he is good, good and straight and square, I know, I know."

CHAPTER IV

HOME AGAIN

Three days later the train was whirling Neddy down from the breezy uplands — home.

He found it pretty hard to leave Valley Farm, everybody had been so good to him. Even the brindle calf rubbed its soft nose against his hand and looked up sorrowfully when he bade it good-bye. And Dan brought a parting gift of six pretty bird's eggs in a carefully polished blacking box, and Jim presented him with a ring carved out of a peachstone, while Mrs. Burroughs packed Daddy Dan's basket with a fat chicken, apples, and eggs, and a print of butter just from the churn.

Ned choked up quite when the kind,

motherly woman kissed him good-bye. And when Mr. Burroughs, having brought him down to the depot, checked his trunk and deposited Daddy Dan's basket at his feet, shook his hand, and left a bright dime in it to buy "some sweet stuff to chaw on," Neddy had to wink hard to keep back the tears that would rise to his eyes. It was so hard to leave, he felt he would like to stay at Valley Farm forever if only little Mama would be there.

Mama — ah, at that name, his heart gave a swift, glad leap. He plunged his hand into his pocket to see that his three silver quarters of grape money were safe. He was going back to Mama, and next summer, when he got his two weeks' holiday, he would bring her out to Valley Farm, and, oh, what fine times they would have together!

And with this bright air castle rising before him, Neddy brushed away the mist in his eyes, and looked out with a young

traveler's interest on the flying landscape, where old Peek-a-boo still towered blue and shadowy in the growing distance. Was Daddy Dan still among those smoky heights? Poor, lonely, friendless Daddy Dan, was he hiding there, as Mr. Burroughs had hinted, driven by some lawless act from the ways of men? Neddy thought of the fierce flash of the old man's eye, his strange, threatening words at their first meeting, and feared sometimes Mr. Burroughs was right.

But right or wrong that golden afternoon at Peek-a-boo remained undimmed in Neddy's thought. Daddy Dan was a friend whom he would not forsake or forget.

On and on swept the train — through wild, sweet wastes which the golden rod and asters still held for their own, past broad farm lands where the late corn was waving its tasselled tops, and the orchards were red with ripening fruit, by beautiful homes, with white pillared porches and vel-

vety lawns. And now the blue waters of the Potomac gleamed through the trees, the beautiful Potomac that leaping down over rock and fall like a frolicsome boy, suddenly steadied into wide, noble life and sweeps from the nation's Capital in unbroken majesty to meet the sea.

Pointing like an uplifted finger through mist and haze, rose the white shaft of Washington monument, the great dome of the Capitol stood out against the September sky. With shriek of steam whistle and clang of bell, the train clattered into the depot and Neddy was home again.

Leaving his trunk to be sent later, Neddy took up his basket and hurried to a store where he could buy Mama's present, a dainty neckpiece which the smiling saleslady assured him had been marked down to half price, then boarding a street car, he soon reached the familiar door that opened at his knock and with a shout of joy he was in Mama's arms once more.

"My boy, my own darling boy," the sweet, trembling cry was like the note of a mother bird, "I did not expect you so soon. Oh, how well you look, and how sun-burned and freckled! My own dear little boy! And you are quite strong again, and have no more headaches and have had a real nice time?"

"Fine," answered Neddy, his own voice shaking a little, as with his arms tight about Mama's waist, he punctuated his remarks with kisses. "Couldn't have been finer, Mama, anywhere without you. Had everything splendid — chicken and cream, and apple dumplings — I brought that basket full of stuff Mrs. Burroughs sent you. Gee! She was nice, mended my clothes, and tucked me in bed at night, and gave me buttermilk and everything. And there were horses to ride, and cows and dogs, and the nicest little calf. You'd *love* that calf, I know. And little soft, yellow chickens that looked like canary birds.

And they had the nicest stable boy, named Jim, and —"

"Yes, Neddy, yes, sit down and take breath," laughed Mama.

"Oh, I can't, I can't," he said as she drew him down on the sofa beside her, "I just have to keep on talking to you, and hugging and kissing you, Mama. Oh! how little you look after Mrs. Burroughs, and how white and sweet! Isn't it sort of dark in here this evening, Mama?"

"Why, no, Neddy, the sun is on the other side of the house now,"

"Oh, I forgot. You see, the sun shines all sides at Valley Farm. But it isn't cosy like this," said Neddy loyally, looking with pride round the little parlor. "Mrs. Burroughs don't bother fixing things much. You've got new curtains to the windows, Mama."

"No, dear, only the old ones laundried."

"They look fine, and oh, mama, darling, what a beautiful cushioned chair!"

"For you, Neddy; you have been so sick I wanted you to have something comfortable. I fixed it for you myself with an old frame Mrs. Munsey let me have out of her garret and Grandma's silk crazy quilt, she made when I was a girl."

"I never would have known it," said Neddy delightedly. "All silk and velvet and cushiony. It looks like it cost a hundred dollars, Mama." And another boyish hug emphasized his satisfaction. "To think you worked so hard for *me*."

"You've been away so long, Neddy, so long and so far." The sweet voice trembled as the speaker thought of those dark days in the hospital when with flushed cheeks and burning hands Neddy seemed journeying beyond love's reach. "I wanted home to look bright and cosy, when you came back."

"It does, it does; it's just the prettiest place I've seen since I left. Valley Farm isn't in it with this parlor, Mama," de-

clared Neddy manfully. "And there! I came very near forgetting — I've got a present for you, too," he continued, producing the neckpiece from his pocket.

"Why, Neddy, darling, it is lovely. Where — when — how did you get it, dear?"

"Earned it, Mama, earned it fair and square myself, picking grapes." And Neddy launched eagerly into an account of his adventures on the haunted heights of Peek-a-boo, while his mother listened, her pretty face paling as she heard of the climb, the storm, the tumble, and last but not least, the exciting encounter with Daddy Dan.

"Oh, Neddy, Neddy," she cried tremulously, "you should never have dared that climb alone!"

"That climb!" Neddy laughed. "You ought to have seen where Daddy Dan led me afterward, up and down over the rocks and heights and log bridges."

"Maybe, maybe he was a crazy man, Neddy."

"Oh, no — no, indeed — his head was level, you can bet. But, but —" Neddy had told Mama everything since the time he could first speak, and he felt he must not conceal facts in the case now. "The folks down at Valley Farm thought he had done something wrong, and was hiding — had been hunted up there, you know."

"Hiding! hunted!" echoed Mama in horror. "And you were up on the mountain with a desperate man like that. Why, he might have killed you, Neddy."

And as Neddy thought of the blaze in Daddy Dan's eye, the hoarse threat of his voice, the fierce grip of his hand, he felt for a moment that Mama's fears were not altogether groundless. Then the loyal, boyish faith rose triumphant over all suspicion.

"Oh, no, he wouldn't — he would never hurt anybody, I know, Mama. He is sick

and poor and hasn't anyone to love or care for him. He lost his wife and little baby and I guess that made him what he is — lonely and sort of queer. It is an awful thing to have no one to love or care for, Mama."

"Oh, it is, it is, indeed," was the trembling answer, for Mama was thinking of those days and nights when Neddy walked far in the Valley of the Shadow, and the chill of such a loneliness lay like ice upon her heart.

"And I don't think he has done anything very wrong, for he told me he came to town in winter, to look for work to keep him warm."

"Poor old man!" said the tender little mother pityingly.

"And so — I hope you won't mind it, Mama, but I told him to come here," said Neddy.

"Here!" echoed his mother in dismay. "A desperate, lawless character like that.

Oh, Neddy, dearest, what will we do with him?"

"I ought not to have done it without asking you, I know," continued Neddy remorsefully, "but he looked so lonely and sad up there all alone, it just — it just popped out, Mama. And even — even if he isn't *very* good, it won't hurt us, Mama, to have him sit by the fire and get warm and have a nice cup of tea." The boyish arms were around Mama's neck, the blue eyes looked into hers wistfully, the young voice had a new tone in its pleading, a tender note of pity and sympathy learned perhaps on those dark days when he was so close to Heaven's gate.

Mama thought of One who had not scorned to eat with publicans and sinners, and after a moment's pause she answered softly, "As you please, Neddy, darling, it is your home and your fireside. Ask whom you please."

"I thought you'd say that," said Neddy

in a relieved tone. "And maybe he'll never come at all."

"Let us hope that he won't," was Mrs. Ray's silent comment, as she pictured to herself a fierce, desperate old outlaw installed as guest in her tiny little home. But she only kissed Neddy and promised that Daddy Dan should have his warm welcome and hot cup of tea whenever he appeared.

And then they talked of other things. Mama had her quiet news to tell of the long, lonely time since Neddy had been gone. How kind Mrs. Ross had carried her off to spend three days in her beautiful country-home, how she had four weeks' steady work on the clothes for the new baby in a foreign legation, how Father Maurice had called every week to ask after his favorite acolyte, and Sister Francesca had saved all the dead roses from the convent altar for Mama's jar of potpourri. "It is sweeter than ever this year, Neddy," and she lifted the top from a quaint old

blue and white vase on the mantel and the air was filled with a delicate fragrance that seemed to Neddy the very breath of home.

"Oh, it is sweet," he said delightedly, "sweeter even than the fresh roses of Valley Farm. But open the basket, Mama, and see all the good things I have brought you."

"Oh, what a fine basket, Neddy; we must send it back to Burroughs when we have unpacked it."

"No, it's mine," answered Neddy. "Daddy Dan gave it to me for the grapes."

"Daddy Dan!" exclaimed little Mother; "why, how queer — and here is a caterer's card on it, Neddy."

"I guess that got left under the grapes when Daddy Dan gave it to me. Gee! we had a fine lunch together — chicken, ham sandwiches, brown bread, with the grandest cheese, in little boxes, a jar of ginger, and everything good."

"With that old tramp on the mountain

top!" exclaimed Mrs. Ray with fresh suspicion. "Oh, Neddy, darling, where could he have got all those things?"

"I don't know," replied Neddy unsuspectingly, "but he had them sure. But Mrs. Burroughs packed the basket this time for you — apples, chicken, eggs, butter, everything good. And I'm hungry as a bear. Let's have dinner right away, Mama, please."

"And we'll ask poor old Miss Whyte," said his mother. "She has been so anxious about you, Neddy, calling on her way upstairs every day to know if I had heard. She is one of those who have no one to love and care for, poor old soul. But — but —" little Mother's face shadowed and her voice took a note of anxious warning. "I don't think I'd say anything about Daddy Dan to her or anyone else, Neddy. There is something — something queer about him — one might — might get him into trouble, dear."

She spoke hesitatingly, not liking to destroy Neddy's trust in his friend. And as Neddy thought of the old gentleman's "queerness," he agreed that Mama was wise and right.

CHAPTER V

OLD FRIENDS

Little Miss Whyte lived higher up than the "third floor," under the very eaves of the house where Neddy had his home. It was a big, old-fashioned house that had been a stately mansion standing back in its own low-bordered garden in the days "before the war." But the great guns thundering along the Potomac woke Washington from a sleepy southern town into the stirring life of a great capital, that bursting away from all its old landmarks stretched into new ways of beauty and growth. The old mansions of the past were left behind, the box-bordered gardens sliced into lots and streets. Mrs. Munsey rented her "drawing room," with

its carved marble mantel and cracked mirrors to a tailor. There was an engine house at the corner, and a score of tumbling negro cabins, gay with sunflowers, fringed the high, toppling bank across the street.

But Neddy's rooms looked down into a back yard that was a relic of the old garden. A big tree waved its spreading boughs; there were roses and hollyhocks, and ivy clambered over the high brick wall.

And just above, with her queer little dormer windows jutting out into the tree-tops, poor Miss Whyte sat all day long making buttonholes for the tailor downstairs. But, oh, how gladly she started up at sight of Neddy when he took up Mama's invitation; how her dim eyes brightened and her withered face puckered into smiles. Her dear, dear boy, she was so delighted to see him again. For Neddy and little Miss Whyte were old friends.

Many a pleasant hour he had spent in her dormer window making button strings which were the envy of every small boy in the neighborhood. And he had been the loyal little gentleman to her always. He never told except to Mama, who had counselled silence on the subject, that she had china teeth that came out all together and wore two kinds of hair — straggling grey when she was busy sewing on her buttonholes, and wavy brown when she went downstairs.

"Come to dinner!" echoed the poor old lady eagerly; why she would come to dinner with Neddy and his dear mother, of course. And a delightful little dinner it seemed to Miss Whyte, when in her best black dress, finished with a white lawn tie and a mourning brooch, her brown, wavy hair carefully adjusted in place, she appeared on the festive scene.

The table was drawn close to the window, where the old tree waved. A big

bunch of golden rod that Neddy nad put in his basket nodded in the painted vase, Aunt Amanda had sent Mama last Christmas. Aunt Amanda always sent embroidered centrepieces or painted china, for rich relations in New York can't realize that sometimes other things would be better — overshoes or flannels, or even half a ton of coal for the little open grate.

Still, the painted vase and violet centrepiece filled Neddy's heart with pardonable pride. And when they were set off to-day by the six rosebud plates, which he had won by getting twenty purchasers for a new silver soap, the table looked fine indeed. And such a feast as it bore for these scantily fed sparrows under Mrs. Munsey's eaves. The plump chicken, the jar of golden honey, the print of butter, the red apples, the bottle of cream — little Miss Whyte, who had not seen such rustic plenty for many a day, grew quite entertaining, as became the guest of honor. She had

spent the Sunday previous with her Cousin Jane, who served "out," or "in," as chance offered, in fashionable circles, and who was always brimful of interesting information about the great world that thrilled and throbbed beyond this old mansion of long ago.

"She has been three weeks at the Bonds," continued little Miss Whyte, warming up under the cheering finale of a good cup of tea. "I knew the time when Abijah Bond drove a gravel cart, my dears, but that's neither here nor there. They've taken General Grayson's house for the winter. And such splendor Cousin Jane says she never saw before, though she has seen much. Mirrors and painting and Persian rugs, and Miss Mildred home from Paris with ten trunks packed to the brim."

"Ten trunks!" echoed Mrs. Ray. Neddy's little mother did not fancy gossip, but knowing what a dull, dreary time Miss

Whyte spent in her little nest upstairs, felt she must let her harmless chatter run on.

"Ten, my dear, no less — Cousin Jane helped the French maid to unpack them. As the girl told Jane, it's her young lady's fifth season and they are all determined she shall make a great match."

"Poor girl!" said Mrs. Ray, smiling. "Is she to be allowed no choice in the matter herself?"

"Choice!" echoed Miss Whyte, nodding. "She has indeed, and it's set high, I can tell you. Jane says the talk is all about Senator Devon, whom they met in Rome last spring. They have their eyes on him — she knows. But, Lord! it would be a pity — it would be a pity indeed — to have a heartless, worldly girl get a man like him."

"Why, do you know him?" asked Mrs. Ray in some surprise.

"No, but Cousin Jane does," answered Miss Whyte. ("No more tea, my dear

Mrs. Ray, now — well, if you insist, just half a cup.) Cousin Jane has made his shirts this ten years or more. He won't buy them from the best stores in town — says he wants them woman-made, as he had them when he was young. It's three dozen every spring, my dear, at two dollars apiece for the making, which is a tidy sum, as you can see. And he coming up to her little place to have his neckband fitted, and laughing and joking with her when the whole country is ringing with his speeches and his doings — it does seem strange and queer sure. And if ever there's a church fair or charity, she has only got to say the word, and it's ten dollars out of his pocket every time. He may swear a bit, and talk rough about being bothered, but that's only his way — and she don't mind.

"You see, his wife was a Catholic, and though he don't hold to any faith himself, he stands by the Church for her sake."

And so, her tongue loosened by repeated

cups of tea, Miss Whyte gossiped on until Mama, seeing Neddy was restless, suggested that he should run out and see if some of the boys were not home from school. Neddie gladly escaped, for he had begun to find his guest a little tiresome. He bounded down the wide stairs, polished with the passing of many feet, through the door that stood open for the accommodation of Mrs. Munsey's guests, and out into the street, fairly butting into a big, square shouldered, pleasant-faced boy, a little older than himself, who had just turned the corner.

"Look out there, where are you going?" said this newcomer gruffly, and then with a sudden whoop he clapped his hands on Neddy's shoulders. "Why, hooray!" he cried jubilantly. "Neddy, you old duffer, where did you drop from?"

"Bob!" said Neddy, quite as delighted as his old schoolmate. "Gee, I'm glad to see you, Bob. I'm just back from the

mountains — got home about two hours ago."

"All right again?" asked Bob. "Quite well — I mean."

"Never felt better," replied Ned heartily.

"Good! I'm glad, old fellow. I can't tell you how I felt when I heard you were going to make a die of it."

"Did you hear that?" asked Neddy with interest.

"Lord, yes; Brother Joseph gave you out to be prayed for in class. Said what a good boy you were and all that sort of soft sawder they pile up on a fellow when he is down and out. Boys were just going to chip in and buy you a funeral wreath. Are you coming back to Saint Martin's this year?"

"No," answered Neddy; "can't afford it. Going back to Roreham's to-morrow. Got to work to help mother, you know."

"I see," said Bob, nodding. The boys

had seated themselves on a ledge of the shelving bank across the street, where a flight of crooked steps went up to the sunflowered height above. "Why don't you strike for something bigger than Roreham's, Neddy?"

"I'm not old enough," was the answer.

"Oh, yes, you are, plenty," said Bob confidently. "I'd make a break for some of the Capitol plums myself, if father would let me. There's Fred Rawlings getting over seventy-five a month as a Senate page."

"What — what is a Senate page?" asked Neddy eagerly.

"A Senate page! Why, it's a cinch of a job, just running around the Capitol waiting on the big wigs there, with half your time to play."

"How do you get there?" questioned Neddy breathlessly.

"As you get everywhere else," laughed Bob. "Push and pull — push and pull. Only, be sure you strike the right place, or

you'll be set down hard as Jack Lawson was."

"Did he try for it?" asked Neddy, his young face alight with interest now.

"Yes," answered Bob; "but he tackled the wrong man — went for Senator Devon — you've heard of Devon, of course."

"Ye —es," replied Ned, trying to recall little Miss Whyte's after-dinner gossip.

"Well, then, you know what a big man he is. Father swears by him, would go without his dinner any day to hear him speak. He says he's straight and square and strong and speaks right to the spot. And when he is roused he makes things quake, I tell you. Well, Jack Lawson, who has the cheek of a Kentucky mule, went to him — which is dead easy, for Devon don't put on any airs — told a long story about wanting a place so he could help support the family. 'Your father is living, you say, my lad,' said the Senator, 'What does he get?'

"'Only eighteen hundred a year, sir,' answered Jack, thinking he had got there sure, 'and he has four children.'

"'Four children,' Devon fired back at him, 'four children, and eighteen hundred a year — and you are crying for more government pap! Why, young man, where I come from they can raise fourteen children on half the money and make *men* of them all, too. No, sir,' he went on to the unlucky Jack, 'no Senate paging for you. Stick to your school books. While this country has a corn crop big enough to feed all Europe I don't believe in setting our young chickens to scratch before they shoot pin feathers. You're looking for cigarettes and matinee money, young man — not for mush, milk and mathematics."

"He had Jack there dead," laughed Bob, "for he hates school worse than poison."

"But he wouldn't have me there," said Neddy eagerly. "I'd want the money for Mama. But I don't know any Senators

and they wouldn't help me if I did, so I must stick to Roreham's. Let's walk round a little. I've been away so long, I want to see how the old town looks."

And the boys walked off together, leaving the crooked steps and sun-flowered bank for wider and brighter ways, into which the great Capital had turned in these later years.

And as Neddy strolled through broad, smooth avenues, golden with the sunset past, the beautiful parks gay with late flowers and sparkling fountains, the charms of valley and mountain seemed to fade away in the rustic distance.

Vaguely, unconsciously, he felt the thrill of the life wider, deeper, stronger, that pulsed in electric currents around him. Here where the great white finger of the Monument pointed ever upward, onward,—where the bronze figures of statesmen and heroes looked down on him from blossoming nooks, where the fair dome of the Cap-

itol told of the councils of a nation, and the pillared fronts of the "White House" marked the goal that American boys have reached — here were heights to climb, fruit to gather, more tempting than steeps and fox grapes of old mist-veiled Peek-a-boo.

CHAPTER VI

PUSH AND PULL

Neddy was off to work bright and early next morning.

Trig and trim in his best jacket, Mama's touch evident in his snowy collar and neatly tied scarf, with a lunch of cold chicken and red apples pleasantly reminding him of Valley Farm, he tripped blithely off to business, with time enough to exchange a friendly "good morning" with the little tailor at the doorway and to stop for a hearty greeting from old Aunt Livy, who was just arriving with a basket of laundry from across the street where the broken gate among the sun-flowers bore the sign —

Nussing — Washing — and
Laying Out — Took in by
Mrs. Livy Lane.

"Bless de Lawd," panted Aunt Livy, her broad black face beaming, "you back agen, chile? I sholy is glad to see you, honey, I is indeed. And looking so pert and chipper, too. Done got right well again?"

"Better than ever, Aunt Livy, thank you," was the cheery answer.

"Thank de Lawd for that," said Aunt Livy, "fur you was bad off dar awhile, chile, went monstrus close to de shining gate. We all done skeered 'bout you, shuah. And Abe, dat ar Abe Linkom of mine, went on like he hedn't half sense. Found him hiding under de sun-flowers, sniffling like a baby gal."

"Good old Abe!" said Ned warmly. "You see, we've always been friends, Aunt Livy."

"Dat's what he said," nodded Aunt Livy, "dat's zackly what dat ar Abe Linkom said. 'I'm black and he's white, I know, Granny, and dar ain't no painting out de difference, but Mr. Neddy and me is friends — jes' fur all de world like de black and white boys was friends long ago! Lawd," Aunt Livy shifted her bundle of washing from one shoulder to the other as she lapsed into reminiscence, "don't I know how dat was when dis hyar berry place we'se standing was old Cunnel Deale's front garden, and Marse Dick Deale and my Tobe was a kiting round arter each other ober de fences and hedge. Marse Dick wouldn't eat a chinkapin less Tobe hed to eat half. An' when dey growed up and Marse Dick he run off to de war, Tobe warn't two days behind him. All de preaching and singing ob glory and freedom couldn't hold him ter home. Hiked off in de dead ob de night and I nebbah seen him no more."

"Was he killed?" asked Neddy, somewhat startled at this tragic climax.

"Lawd, yes, chile, killed *dead,*" replied Aunt Livy. "Couldn't speck nuthing but killing kiting arter a dare-devil like Marse Dick. Marse Dick, he got shot first, a scrambling up de hill under de shot and shells, and den Tobe, he scramble up behind to fotch out his master, and he got shot, too, and dey find dem both togedder by de spring. Tobe wif his hat full of water, whar he was trying to take a drink to Marse Dick, and done guv out. Yes, sah, Tobe was a good niggah, shuah, I's married three times since, but nebbah found anodder man like Tobe. Dey don't grow dat pattern dis here times. 'Cept Abe Linkom, he takes after his grandad, shuah. Got jest de same old time dumbfool ways. Can't get no schooling in his head, but he kin handle de hoe, and de whitewash brush good as any grown man now."

"Abe is a good fellow, I know," said Neddy. "I've got some apples for him — brought a lot from the country."

"I'll tell him," said Aunt Livy. "And dat ar persimmon tree of ourn is just weighted down dis year, honey. Dey ain't fairly ripe yet — draw your mouf ef you bites 'em. Persimmons is like some folks, dey nebbah sweeten till de frost teches them sharp, and dey gets wrinkly. But dey'll be ready, soon, Marse Ned, and so will de buttermilk and johnny cake, cross de street."

"I won't forget," said Neddy, nodding "good-bye" to Aunt Livy as she went off with her bundle of washing, while he kept on his way through the busy streets, where the children were tripping gaily to the opening schools, men and women, brown with the sunburn of summer holidays were hurrying officeward, and all was brisk and bright with the new life that comes with the beginning of things whether in work or

play. Neddy, too, felt a sudden glow surge through him — a new desire to accomplish something in this busy world. Involuntarily, he hastened his steps.

And now at last the great front of Roreham's — it's big glass windows gay with autumn goods flashed cheery welcome on the returned wanderer. Neddy entered the wide-swinging portals, and glanced around him with a smile that faded suddenly into a look of blank dismay. For swift are the changes in the strenuous life of an up-to-date department store. The busy hum of "opening" echoed through the long aisles, the cash railway still flashed in bewildering vistas, the yards of ribbon still waved in gay triumph, the meshes of lace still fluttered over counter and shelf, but a blond-haired stranger stood in Miss Marling's place, and perched in Neddy's cage was a black-eyed girl, with two balls of twine ready for a busy day. And a new floor-walker stopped Neddy's advance with

a questioning stare. "Well, young man," he asked, after a pause, "what do you want?"

"Miss — Miss Marling," was the hesitating answer; "isn't she here?"

"Miss Marling," repeated the gentleman, who wore a diamond scarf-pin and was smart generally, "I don't know the lady. Do you, Miss Elinor?" to the blond stranger who was sorting her lace collars for a bargain sale.

"Miss Marling? Louise Marling? Why, of course, she was married two months ago and quit."

"And — and Mr. Davis," faltered Neddy.

"Davis," echoed the gentleman. "If you mean my amiable predecessor, he has another job, in Baltimore."

"Could I see Mr. Forney, the manager?" asked Neddy desperately.

"You might," answered the floor-walker, who evidently felt cleverness was his forte,

"if you take the next steamer, my friend. Mr. Forney is in Paris buying goods."

"You see — you see," explained Ned, growing hot and nervous, "I used to work here until I got sick, and I thought — I thought I could come back and get my place."

"May I ask what the place was?" said the gentleman. "Cashier or general manager?" and the blond lady giggled. "I was bundle boy up there," blurted Neddy, pointing to his former post.

"Oh," said the other, "as you perceive, we have changed our pattern for the better as you must confess. We have girls instead of boys; they come cheaper and prettier, don't they, Becky?"

"None of your sass," answered the black-eyed one pertly.

The blow had fallen. Neddy stood in blank dismay while ribbons and railway seemed whirling about him again as in his fever dream.

"It is always the unexpected that occurs," says the old French proverb, and fire, flood, and earthquake were really more to be expected by Neddy than this. His friends gone, his place taken! and himself forgotten quite!

And our Neddy learned in one sharp shock the lesson it sometimes takes half a century to teach — how little the "Number One" we hold so weighty counts in Life's great sum, how soon the big *I* is rubbed off Life's hard slate.

Dismayed and bewildered, he turned away, feeling that he had been mocked and scorned, when the great gilt words on the swinging doors caught his eye —"Push — Pull"— they directed the entering and leaving customers.

"Push and pull"— Bob Dixon's talk of yesterday flashed back to Neddy. "Push and Pull"— the "open sesame" to success. "Push and Pull"— Neddy braced up and swallowed the lump in his throat.

He could — he could — he *would* — push and pull for another place. And striding manfully out into the sunshine, where some big wagons were being loaded up already, a cheery voice suddenly fell like music on his ears.

"Hullo," it called, "by Jing, if it ain't little Neddy Ray. Shake hands, my boy, shake hands. I am glad to see you again."

Griggs! Big, burly Tom Griggs, the shipping clerk, loading up his vans — Neddy had quite forgotten his friend Tom Griggs. His greeting was such a pleasant shock after those others inside that for a moment Neddy could not speak. He could just shake hands with a sort of tremble about his lips that the good-natured Griggs saw. He sized up the situation at once.

"Found your job gone, eh? I guessed it would be. There's a lot of new folks in there changing things generally. Well, you ain't missing much."

"No," answered Neddy, "but it was a

good deal to Mother and me. The "Fresh Air Fund" sent me away, but I've got to go to work now to make up for lost time. I've got to help Mother even if I must go dig."

"Dig!" laughed Griggs, "you look like that, Neddy!"

"I'll do it," said Neddy resolutely. "I'll do anything. Do you know any place where I could find a job, Griggs?"

Griggs looked at his little friend reflectively.

"Think you could stand out-door work in cold weather?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I know I could."

"I'm not so sure of it," answered Griggs doubtfully. "You've been pretty low down — and are not very big to start — still you might try it."

"Oh, what, Griggs, what?" asked Neddy.

"Special delivery," answered the shipping clerk. "You see, this is likely to be

a big season with us and it will take all our service and more to make good. There's always some high and mighty folks that want their things in a tremendous hurry, and can't wait for them. We've got to keep their custom, so we're going to put two or three bright young chaps on bicycles for special rush work. It will be four dollars a week, but when the season fairly starts, it will keep you humming — and you're not overstrong."

"Oh, yes, I am, I am," said Neddy eagerly, "and I would love to ride a bicycle, Griggs. Oh, if you can get me the job, please, please do."

"Come in then," said Griggs. "We'll see about it right now."

And he led Neddy down a wide alleyway into the shipping and delivery region of Rorcham's big stores. There were no plate glass nor shining cash railway, nor meshes of gay ribbon and lace here, no blond ladies with pompadours or smart

gentlemen with diamond pins. The high windows were iron barred — the bare floors strewn with straw and sawdust and bagging, the goods piled in huge bales and boxes to the ceiling. Rough men in their shirt sleeves were hauling packages and rolling trucks. Disorder prevailed in general. It was like doing down to the roots of things and seeing how they grew, for here was the real work that upheld the shining, dazzling show above.

Griggs led his young protégé across two big rooms, to a little glazed office, where a sharp-eyed, grizzle-headed old gentleman sat behind a barricade of account books.

"Here's a boy that I think will do for our 'special delivery,' Mr. Mills. He was upstairs in the bundle department, but had typhoid and had to leave. Finds his place gone and wants another."

"Oh, he does," the sharp eyes focused through a pair of very glittering spectacles seemed to search Neddy through and

through — "Nothing against him upstairs?"

"Nothing at all, sir," answered Griggs.

"This special business is responsible work," continued the old gentleman. "It means handling high-priced orders C. O. D. You'll have to give security, young man."

"Security, sir!" echoed Neddy.

"Yes, get your father or uncle or somebody to sign for you, to say, they're ready to make good if you should happen to bolt off with our money or packages."

"Oh, I'd never do that, sir," said Neddy, flushing — "and I — I haven't any father or uncle or —"

"You've got me," said a friendly voice at his side. "Will my signature do, Mr. Mills?"

"Yours," there was a kindly gleam in the glasses turned on the speaker, "yours, Tom Griggs? I don't ask any better name, sir."

"Then here goes," said Griggs, taking

up a pen. "Shove over your paper, whatever it is, Mr. Mills. I'm ready to back Neddy Ray with every dollar I've got."

"All right," said Mr. Mills, as Griggs dashed a big, bold signature across the paper handed to him.

"The job is yours, my boy. See that he has a first class bicycle, Griggs, and let him start in to-day, at four dollars a week."

"Oh, Griggs, dear Griggs," Neddy squeezed his friend's horny hand as they turned away, "I just don't know how to thank you, Griggs."

"What have you got to thank me for?" laughed Griggs. "Saying I'd back you? Why, Lord bless us, don't I know you, boy? Haven't I seen you in that little red cassock and surplice Sunday after Sunday, or kneeling by your pretty mother's side at early Mass. Tom Griggs ain't any soft fool, Neddy — but he knows how good boys are made, and stands ready to back them."

"Push and Pull," the big doors flashed

the words at Neddy as he passed them again that morning on his way to get his bicycle — "Push and Pull."

Was it "Push and Pull" that got him this new start, or something better, stronger, higher?

Tom Griggs would say it was neither push nor pull could make him stand or sign for any boy on earth.

CHAPTER VII

"SPECIAL DELIVERY"

And then began pleasant days indeed for Neddy, for the bicycle was bought and Griggs took care it should be the first-class article Mr. Mills had ordered; and mounted on this shining steed, our Neddy skimmed over the smooth streets like a bird on the wing.

Orders came thick and fast, to the trig, brisk little special messenger, for an order to Neddy meant speedy delivery and swift return, as everyone soon learned.

Even the blond-haired lady at Miss Marling's old counter sent down her most valuable and particular parcels with the request: "Immediate, please, by Neddy Ray."

And now as the season began to open, the tide of life from North, South, East and West, pulsing with mighty currents of will and purpose, swept into the Nation's Capital — like the life blood to heart and brain.

Great issues were at stake, powerful forces were massing for debate in the coming session of Congress, the thrill of pending combat was in the air.

But of this our Neddy knew nothing. He saw only the broad avenues were filling up with busy crowds, that he had to steer his flying wheel carefully among the dashing carriages, that beautiful homes were opening on every side, where special orders had to be delivered early and late.

Customers were sometimes cross and capricious, Neddy was often kept waiting in splendid halls while fashionable ladies compared laces and ribbons or argued over bills they had not the cash to meet.

All these emergencies Neddy met like the little gentleman he was, never rude or

impatient, but always ready to please and to serve.

Then, there were the pleasant evenings at home, when the little fire that Mama hoarded carefully all day burst into glow and cheer for Neddy's coming, when the table was set with the rosebud plates, and the violet centrepiece, and the dinner — well, though as a dinner it would scarcely come up to the requirements of Valley Farm, to Neddy it was altogether right. Such nice, little, brown stews as Mama concocted after recipes of her own, such batter bread and molasses, such potato cake, made as old Nurse Norah had made over her peat fire in the long ago, such delicious desserts of ripe bananas, at two for a penny from old Pedro's cart.

And then what gay times afterward when the dishes were washed and the lamp lighted, the lamp that had been a dull, sickly relic of the old house, until Mama had polished up the blackened Cupid and

provided him with an umbrella of pink tissue paper, that hid all deficiencies and filled the little room with a soft, rosy glow.

Then Mama would put on her pretty neckpiece and get her work-basket. Or, perhaps, she would take her old guitar from its corner and would sing softly to its tinkling strings. Sometimes old Miss Whyte would come down with her brown hair on for a bit of gossip, or Mrs. Munsey would drop in to tell her of all her "worrits" and troubles with servants and lodgers downstairs.

Then, the beautiful Sundays, that were best of all, when the busy working world seemed to drop quite away from Mama and Neddy and they walked sweet, quiet ways of light and peace. Often there was no hot dinner on Sundays, no rosebud dishes to wash, nothing to break its blessed rest.

But when High Mass was over and Neddy had put away cassock and surplice, they would take a little box packed with

sandwiches and cookies and go off in the street cars to some quiet little nook out of town, the shaded groves of the Soldiers' Home, or the wild, sweet depths about Rock Creek, where the last wood flowers were hiding, and the trees were aflame with crimson and gold — and there spend the whole beautiful afternoon under the falling leaves.

So the bright autumn days sped on until Jack Frost had opened the chestnut burrs, and crinkled the persimmons, and Neddy and "Abe Linkum" were roasting their nuts and apples over Aunt Livy's fire on Hallowe'en. Aunt Livy's cabin was just the place to spend that spooky vigil. Low and dim and dusky, with all sorts of queer things swinging from its smoky rafters, bunches of wonder-working yarbs, gourds, and peppers, dried snake-skins, and rabbit feet to ward off spells and charms. For Aunt Livy's professional duties were wide and numerous. She didn't stand back "for

none of dese new fangled nusses," as she stoutly declared.

"Lor, chillun, I knows lot more'n dere books kin teach 'em. Didn't I rig up Cunnel Diggs' ole Aunt Cailine, when ebbery white doctah in dis town gib her up? But de minnit I lay eyes on dat pore ole critter I knowed what it was."

"And what was it, Gran?" asked "Abe Linkum" breathlessly.

"Hoodoo, chile; jes nachal hoodoo. 'Sis Ling,' says Aunt Cailine, 'kin you do anything fur me, Sis Ling?'

"'I'll try, Sis Cailine,' I says, 'though I see it's got you strong.' And it had, chile; it tuk me three months to wrastle that hoodoo down, and rig Aunt Cailine up. Dat was 'bout de powfullest witchwork I ebber done."

"But — but," Neddy felt conscientiously bound to interpose, "it isn't right to do witch work, Aunt Livy."

"Mebbe it ain't, chile, mebbe it ain't,

but when you sees de hoodoo is dar, what you gwine to do?"

"Tell Mr. Neddy 'bout dat ar witch-work at Cunnel Coleman's, Gran," said "Abe Linkum," who was seated on an old three-legged chair, watching the chestnuts in the pan.

"Lawd, boy, what you s'pose white folks want to hear ole niggah stories for?" said Aunt Livy.

"Oh, but I do, I do. I just love your stories, Aunt Livy. You've had so many, so many—" Neddy paused to select the most polite word—"so many 'experiences.'"

"Dat's so, chile, dat is sholy so. When you goes roun' forty or fifty year, I can't zackly say which, a nussin' and a layin' out, you has 'sperience dat no pra'r meeting kin gib.

"Lor,' de babies I'se handled and de corpses I'se stretched. I couldn't begin to count. But dat ''sperience' I had at Cun-

nel Coleman's was de curusest of all. 'Twas long, long time ago, 'fo' de wah, 'fo' I merried Tobe. He was Marse Dick's man den, at de big house whar you libs now, chile, an' I was Miss Patty's maid.

" An' Miss Patty dem days was fresh and sweet as a June rose. Befo' she was half-growed de beaux come flocking 'roun' like bees to de clover tips, an' when she dun come out, in a skirt nine yards roun' wif de lace flounces looped up wif flowers, an' her head all over curls, an' her silver bokay-holder full of japonicas in her hand, lawd, chile, dar ain't nuthing dese days to come nigh to her. Quality foks knowed how to dress den — none of dese here stingy squinchy tight-fits, but dey put in plenty ob de dry goods.

" ' Livy,' she used ter say to me nights when I was brushing out dem curls, an' de beaux had been a-pestering her wuss dan ever, ' I'll have to marry one of 'em, I suppose, Livy. Which do you like best?'

L. OF C.

"'Lor', Miss Pat,' I used ter titter, 'dat ain't fer me to say. But if I did have my pick, it 'ud be Marse Jack Wilson.'

"'Oh, Livy —' then she use to shake de curls ober her face, mad-like, 'how can you say that? I just *hate* Jack Wilson.'

"Den I knowed, honey, dat Marse Jack war de man certain. I 'spec' gals has more sense dese times, but den dey was cantankerous sholy, and Miss Pat she did lead Marse Jack a chase, I tell you. She was dat uppish and dat mean, an' dat contrairy to him, dat I wouldn't hab knowed her for my own sweet young miss, ef it hedn't been fer de nights when I brushed her curls and she'd turn herself again. An' when de time come for him to go away on his ship — he was a navy officer — she got wusser dan ebber. I nebber saw nuthing like de way she treated him!

"She wouldn't wait ter give him a chance ter say good-bye, but whisked off down to her Uncle Coleman's at Culpepper fur a

Hallowe'en party, wifout eben telling him whar she was going."

"But you, Gran, you," interposed "Abe Linkum" eagerly, "you told him."

"Shet up, boy; is you telling dis hyah story, or is I?" asked Aunt Livy sharply, and "Abe Linkum" subsided. "Well, we went down to dat ar party, me and Miss Pat, and it was a party sholy. Big house jes' a-humming wif young folks, wood fires a-snapping and a-blazing in de chimblys, cider bar'ls runnning for black and white, apples by de bar'l, and nuts by de peck.

"And Miss Patty, she was 'bout de gayest and de gladdest seeming ob all de young folks dat was laughing and singing and dancing, roun' dat big house dat Hallowe'en. But I knowed, chile, Livy knowed her heart was nigh busting wif de ache and de break for Mr. Jack dat was gwine away. 'Twas time foh de witch-work shuah.

"So when she come up to let me fix her

ha'r and put on her pretty pink dress for de big dance dat night, I says:

"'Ef you don't mind, Miss Pat, I'd like to borrow dat ar silver handle looking-glass ob your'n for a little bit to-night. Dar's a grave-yard handy, an' I wants ter try my fortune.

"'Your fortune, Livy?' she says.

"'Yes'm,' I says. 'It's Holly Eve, you know, and I'se gwine ter try de grave-yard spell ter see if Tobe is faithful and trew. You goes to de grave-yard, and holds a looking-glass up ter de light ob de moon, and you calls a name in yo heart, and ef he lubs ye true yo sees him dar in de glass."

"'Oh, Livy, how funny!' she laffed.

"'No, miss, 'tain't funny — it's — it's serious. De grave-yard dew is a powerful spell. I heern about it befo', and Holly Eve de sperrits run loose, anyhow, and I'se gwine to catch Tobe's ef I can,' said I.

"Miss Pat had sot down on de bed and was looking at me wif her eyes shining.

"'Livy,' she says, 'I've a mind to try it, too — if — if you won't tell anybody, Livy.'

"'Lawd, no, Miss Patty, I won't tell, but you has to wait till moon-up.'

"'I know — you wait under the porch about ten, with my red cloak, and I'll steal away from the dance, and go with you, Livy — and we'll try — try our fortunes together.'

"And we did, chile — jes about ten Miss Patty came stealing out inter de darkness under de porch, and I put her red cloak 'bout her, and we clipped off togedder down de garden walk, and cross de grove to de hollow whar de Colemans has buried de dead for more'n a hundred years.

"Lor', but 'twas a creepy place, de ole stone wall kivered with ivy, an' de bare trees throwing dere black shadows 'cross our way, and de crumbly old grave stones standing up dar so solemn in de moonlight.

De shivers went up and down my back, I tell you, for I warn't more'n sixteen or seventeen den — but I was boun' to see dis hyah witch-work troo. And though dar was bold sojer blood in Miss Patty's veins, she was sort ob shaky, too.

"'You look fust, Livy,' she says.

"And I held de glass, whar de moon shine clar in it, and I looked in and didn't see nuffin but my own black face."

"'Oh, do you see anything, Livy?' Miss Patty asked, trembling like.

"'Yes'm,' I says, 'I sees a niggah's face, and it belongs to Tobe Morris shuah.' For it did — I was promised to marry Tobe de New Year." Aunt Livy chuckled at the recollection of her equivocation.

"'Oh, let me look, let me look, Livy,' she said, all of a quiver like.

"And I give her the glass, chile, an' she looked — an' dar — dar was Marse Jack Wilson's face and Marse Jack's eyes lookting trew love into her own. An' she gave

a little low cry an' I turned and run fast as my heels would go."

"And left her all alone?" cried Neddy.

"He — he, no," chuckled Aunt Livy. "I lef' her wif dat ghost, dat I had rigged honey. He'd take keer of her, I knowed. She cum back to de house wif him a little later wif a diamond ring Marse Jack had been kerrying roun' fur months on her finger and a diamond light in her eyes, fur all was settled at last. An' dat night when we was up in her room togedder Miss Patty put her arms roun' my black neck and cried on my shoulder.

"'Oh, Livy, Livy,' she says, 'you did it — you brought him back to me; you was de Holly Eve witch, I know.'

"He — he — he," chuckled Aunt Livy, "an' I 'spec' I was, I 'spec' I was, honey — any rate, dey nebba forgit it. Miss Patty's head as white as cotton now and Marse Jack he dun got 'tired as General or Commodore or suthing big, but dey ain't nebba

fergot. Look here, honey —" Aunt Livy drew an envelope from her breast — "dis wot come dis mawning, dis wot comes ebbery Holly Eve." Folded in a dainty crested sheet of paper, Aunt Livy showed a crisp ten-dollar bill, with the brief message: "For our good witch, Livy"— signed, "Miss Patty and Marse Jack."

CHAPTER VIII

NEDDY'S VISITOR

"Miss Mildred Bond, 1800 Blank Avenue. Immediate," was the order that sent Neddy skimming off on his wheel one November afternoon, when the leaves were swirling down in the broad streets, and Jack Frost's first nip was in the bracing air.

It was the day after Thanksgiving, when Rob Dixon had appeared with two tickets for the great ball game on the Georgetown campus, and Neddy had spent an hilarious holiday shouting excitedly over the triumph of the Blue and Grey.

Then Tom Griggs had given him an invitation for the evening to a show of "Moving Pictures," for the benefit of a hos-

pital, and altogether Neddy was a little tired and sleepy after such unusual diversion. He was beginning to think of dinner and home as, about four o'clock, he drew up at the door of a splendid mansion, where a gay awning stretching out over the sidewalk and the tuning of musical instruments in the conservatory told that some social function was already in progress.

"All right," said a pompous butler, taking the parcel from Neddy's hand.

"It's C. O. D., if you please, and immediate," said Neddy, who knew the movements of such stately functionaries were apt to be slow. "Oh!" said the liveried gentleman gruffly, "then, I suppose you'll have to wait. In the side hall please, for there is a reception here to-day." And the speaker led Neddy to a corner, where the turn of a broad staircase was hidden by a screen of palms. Our little special messenger sat down on a cushioned divan, quite awed by the splendor around him. He

had been in stately mansions before, but never had seen anything like this; Neddy looked about him in wide-eyed amazement. Though it was still day outside, the sun had been shut out by closed shutters and rich curtains, and the lofty rooms glowed with soft tinted lights gleaming amid banks of flowers and bowers of palms. The air was all fragrance and music; it was like the "fairy palace" of Neddy's childish story books. And waiting there in the soft, warm-cushioned corner, the tired little messenger's head began to nod and he drifted off into a pleasant, half-waking dream.

He could still hear the tinkling music in the conservatory, the deep tones of gentlemen talking in the hall beyond the screening palms:

"Devon — Devon!" the name fell dully on his ear — "glad to see you back again, Senator."

And then an answering voice said something about the mountains, a voice that

took Neddy's dreaming thoughts back to some seeming long-ago.

Again the rugged heights of Peek-a-boo seemed to rise before him; the music he heard was the tinkle of its falling waters, the fragrance in the air was the spicy breath of its cedars and ivies. Again he was clambering its rocky path, when — "You little wretch!" — the sharp voice like the cut of a whip startled him from his dreams. "What do you mean by sleeping here?" and the little messenger sprang up wide awake, to face the most beautiful vision he had ever seen. A lady stood at the turn of the staircase, a lovely lady all in shining white, with diamonds sparkling at her throat and in the wavy gold of her hair.

"What do you mean?" she repeated angrily, her eyes blazing like blue lightning at the bewildered boy.

"It's the messenger from Roreham's, Miss," said the butler, stepping forward.

"He brought your gloves, I think the maid said. The parcel was C. O. D. and he said he must wait —"

"Wait!" echoed the lady. "I never heard of such impertinence. Wait for the price of a pair of gloves? You should have sent him off, Dunn, at once."

"I am sorry, Miss," said Neddy, vaguely conscious that something was wrong. "I can take them back, of course."

"Take them back, you little fool? I have them on."

"Then, if you will, give me the money, please. The order was C. O. D.," said the boy politely.

"Your order! Your order! What do I care for your orders, you little idot? To come clamoring at such a time as this for a few miserable dollars! It is the last time I will buy anything from your Cheap Jack of a store, and you can tell them so. Put this boy out at the lower door, Dunn — put him out at once."

"Mildred, my dear, my dear —" a tall, white-haired lady came hurriedly down the stairs and laid her hand on the angry girl's arm. "Hush, hush, I beg of you. Senator Devon is just beyond those palms. He came with your father a few minutes ago. Go down and receive him — I will settle with the boy."

And Neddy was led off by Dunn, who muttered something about a "she-devil," as they passed down the stairs and into a lower hall, where after another wait of half an hour the money was brought down to the little messenger and he was allowed to go from the great house, into which gay guests were crowding and where the beautiful Miss Mildred reigned as queen.

Mama listened to her boy's story that evening with indignant sympathy. "A rude, heartless girl," she said.

"But, gee! she was pretty," declared Neddy. "Oh, Mama, if I could only dress you up like that all in shining white, with

diamonds at your throat and in your hair."

"Oh, Neddy, Neddy," she laughed, "they would not suit me at all, dear."

"Oh, yes, yes, they would — you would look like a little fairy queen, Mama. And I would like to put you in just such a fairy palace, all full of lights and music and flowers."

"My dear little boy, I would not have it," was the earnest answer, "not with the thorns you saw under the flowers, thorns of bitterness, anger, pride, Neddy. I would rather have our little home in its lowliness and peace a thousand times. But," she added, seeing a shadow of disappointment in her boy's eyes, "sometime, when you are a man, Neddy, you will give Mama another kind of home in the country, dear, God's beautiful country, where there are no great walls of brick and mortar to shut out the stars and the sky, only big, kind trees to shelter us with their leafy arms, and the sun shining on all sides of us, all sides,

Neddy, boy. Won't that be better even than the fairy palace?"

"And a porch, Mama, a wide, beautiful porch, all wreathed with roses. Oh, yes, that will be better," said Neddy eagerly. "And cows and chickens and horses. And a calf, Mama, a dear little brindle calf. And oh, Mama, won't you wear white dresses, not shining white like hers, but soft and cloud like, and have roses instead of the diamonds, and — and —"

A tap at the door broke in upon this pleasant conversation.

"It is Miss Whyte, dear," said Neddy's mother. "She can not hear very well. Open the door for her."

And Neddy opened the door, stared for a moment at the grey-coated figure on the threshold, and then cried out in delighted recognition:

"Daddy Dan! Mama, Mama, here is Daddy Dan!"

Daddy Dan indeed! Daddy Dan buttoned

up to the neck in a big grey coat and seeming to fill the little room with his grizzly, rugged presence. Daddy Dan, evidently feeling a little awkward and out of place in this pretty little, rose-let room. Mama, though a trifle dismayed, we must confess, met her unlooked-for guest graciously.

"How d'ye do, ma'am, how d'ye do?" said Daddy Dan, as he took her outstretched hand. "Glad to meet you. I told this little man of yours I'd look him up and so I've come — I've come."

"And Neddy is delighted, as you see," said Mrs. Ray kindly. "He has been hoping for this visit when you came back to town. He has never forgotten the pleasant day on the mountain with you," added the little lady, anxious to reassure her visitor.

"Gee, no!" added Neddy. "It was just the finest tramp I ever had in my life, Daddy Dan. And didn't we find the grapes, though? That's the present I bought for Mama on her neck now. You

sent her half of it, you know, with your compliments. Golly, I am glad to see you again. Sit down here in my chair by the fire and get warm."

Daddy Dan hesitated.

"I didn't think — think of staying, Sonny; I just — just looked in."

"Oh, but you must stay —" Neddy pulled over his arm chair to the fireside. "We want you to stay, Daddy Dan. Dinner is over, but we've got some cookies in the cupboard and Mama will make you a nice hot cup of tea — won't you, Mama?"

"Certainly," was the cordial answer; though Mama did not know to her satisfaction the character of Neddy's friend, she was too gentle and kind to dampen her boy's welcome. "The kettle is boiling and it won't take a minute. Take off your overcoat, Mr. — Mr. ——, must I give you Neddy's name, too?" and she turned to her guest with a charming smile.

"Yes, ma'am," was the blunt answer,

"Just Daddy Dan, if you please. It's the name I like best."

Mama's doubts as to the guest deepened, but a glance at the strong, rugged lines of the face revealed by the firelight removed all fear. Nameless and outlawed, Daddy Dan might be, but she felt only friendly feeling brought him here to-night.

So the tea was made, and the cookies set out on the table, while perched on the arm of Daddy Dan's chair, Neddy chattered like a magpie, plying the visitor with questions which were answered somewhat evasively, it seemed to Mama's quick woman's ear.

"Have you been long in town, Daddy Dan?"

"Just a day or two, Sonny. I stayed up in the clouds until I got rid of that confounded hay-fever. Then — then I came down."

"And you've got work here in Washington?"

"Yes, I've got work."

"A good job, Daddy Dan?" Neddy's tone was eager.

"Well, fairish, Sonny, fairish," was the answer.

"Where is it, Daddy Dan?"

"Neddy, dear," interposed his mother, "are you not asking a great many questions?"

"It's because I thought, Mama, that if Daddy Dan hadn't a good place, I might get him one. Griggs wants help down in the packing room. It's only six dollars a week, but it isn't very hard work."

"Thank you, Sonny, thank you." Daddy Dan's big hand closed over the little one that lay on the arm of the chair. "I won't bother you to look out for me there just yet. I've got a pretty good place up on the hill yonder — at — at the Capitol. I — I — keep up the steam there," added Daddy after a pause.

"Oh!" said Neddy in a satisfied tone.

"And that pays more than six dollars a week, I know."

"Yes," answered Daddy Dan, stroking his grizzled chin, "it pays more, sonny, it pays more — but then, paying don't count much with me."

"No, I don't think it does," said Neddy gaily. "You'd rather be on the mountain top gathering grapes, wouldn't you, Daddy Dan?"

"Oh, Neddy, Neddy, what a chatterbox you are to-night," said his mother, who had an uncomfortable intuition that Daddy Dan was being questioned on matters of which he did not care to talk. "Get the cream and sugar, dear, and let me give Daddy Dan his cup of tea."

And with womanly tact little Mother turned the conversation to Neddy himself, to his new work, and how good it was for him to be out in the open air, after his summer's illness.

Daddy Dan, drinking his tea from the

rosebud cup, listened and as his deep-set eyes turned on his little friend, there was a look in them that warmed Mama's heart.

"It's good for him," he said, nodding; "yes, ma'am, as you say, it's good for him. Better than being shut up in a school room these bright days. I'm glad he finds that things are going so well with him,— very glad — I don't know that they could be — much better or — or happier," concluded Daddy Dan, with a glance around the rose-lit-room.

"You must come again, Daddy Dan, come often," said Neddy as his guest stood up to go.

"If you don't mind, ma'am," said Daddy Dan, looking to Mama, "I will come again. I don't often have such a pleasant evening or such a good cup of tea."

"Come again, by all means," said Mama smiling, "Whenever you feel like it, Daddy Dan."

And Daddy Dan clasped the hand she held out to him and said he would.

"Poor lonely man," she said after he had gone, "we must be kind to him, Neddy, even if — if —" Mama hesitated. Somehow as she recalled that strong, kind face she could not speak her doubts and fears. "We will be good to him, Neddy."

CHAPTER IX

A PLUCKY VENTURE

The bright snappy days of early December had come and Neddy was busy indeed now. Special orders came thick and fast, and our little messenger was kept spinning from one end of the gay city to the other, his cheeks glowing, his eyes sparkling in his swift sweep through the wintry air.

For Jack Frost was out indeed now, not the grim, grey Jack Frost of other climes, but a pleasant roughish chap, far too polite to tweak ears or nip noses. True, he snatched away the golden veil of the Indian summer, and left the fields brown and bare; he scattered the last leaves from the oaks and maples, hushed the tink-

ling plash of the fountain in park and square. But the gay foliage beds were still a glowing mass of color, red and yellow chrysanthemums nodded saucily in the sheltered gardens, even the late roses still put forth pale, timorous buds, while the beautiful Capital itself burst into all its winter life and bloom.

The stores were filled with gay, brilliant crowds; Senators and Members thronged the great hotels; the big flag floating from the dome of the Capitol told that Congress was in session and that "Uncle Sam," had begun his winter's work.

Fred Rawlings, trig and neat in his new Senate-page uniform, was a big man among the other boys now. "He makes me sick," grumbled Bob Dixon to Neddy as they came home one Sunday evening after a tramp through the woods, during which Fred had descanted on the privileges and perquisites of his new position to the envy of all his hearers. "To hear him

talk you'd think he was running the whole government machinery. If a softy like Fred can get such a cinch, I don't see why you don't try for it, Ned."

"Oh, I wish I could," said Neddy, eagerly," but — but — I don't know how."

"There's Senator Devon — why don't you tackle him like Jack Rawlings did? He can't sit down on you about having a father with eighteen hundred a year. They say he is just the nicest, plainest sort of an old chap and don't put on any airs at all. Just get up your nerve, Neddy, and give him a straight talk about your mother and I believe you'd get as good a place as Fred's." Neddy thought about it all night, he talked about it to Tom Griggs as they ate their lunch next day among the packing boxes.

"It looks as if it might be a good thing for you, Neddy," said that good friend thoughtfully. "You're doing all right here — but it isn't much of a show for a

family man. And if these page jobs at such a figure are being handed round you ought to try for one sure — How it's done I don't exactly know, but I've got a cousin that's a watchman up at the Capitol and I'll ask him what's the right move." And honest Tom came next day brimful of information.

"Jim says Senator Devon is all right. If he knew you were working for your mother he'd lend a hand sure. But you'd never be able to get a word with him up at the Capitol. He is head and ears in business there, night and day all sorts of people after him. There's some big fight on in Congress and he is heading it for all he is worth. But Jim happens to know that he slips off every Thursday afternoon to see how things are going on at a place he is fixing up on the Kent Road, and you might catch him there. It would do no harm to try at any rate," added Tom; "I'll get Mr. Mills to give you a half holiday

to-morrow. You just take the trolley, jump off at Kent Road, and anybody along there will point out Sunset View — Devon's place."

And so it happened that on a crisp, bright afternoon Neddy was speeding off on electric wings over the trolley road that led high up in the Maryland hills. He had said nothing to Mama about this "venture," it was too much of a "forlorn hope," and though it took more courage to brave the great Senator than to climb the heights of Peek-a-boo in the face of a gathering storm, our young soldier did not shirk but followed the same white flag of mother's love in this new and untried march.

He alighted at the cross-road, as Griggs had told him. "Devon's place," said the man whom he questioned. "Straight up the hill — you can't miss it. But there is no one there; the men quit work an hour ago. Half holiday the Senator gives, to see the big ball game."

But Neddy had waited to hear no particulars; he was already half way up the hill, where a grove of great oaks spread their bare boughs over an old-fashioned house that was evidently under vigorous reconstruction. The broad front was masked by scaffolding, the doors and windows were boarded up. But the iron gates stood open and our young hero, his heart beating a rat-a-tat in his breast, walked boldly in. There was no one to be seen — all was silence. He pushed on round the house, that stretched back into a maze of box-bordered gardens, where the hill, cut into gentle terraces, faced a superb view of the distant Capitol, that lay like a white dream of domes and spires against the evening sky. Ah, someone was here! On a stone bench under a great locust tree a man sat smoking. Neddy stepped forward to speak to him and faced — Daddy Dan.

For a moment both stared in speechless

amazement — then Neddy cried joyfully:

"Daddy Dan! dear old Daddy Dan, what are you doing away out here?"

"Just what I was going to ask you," was the gruff answer, "I cut loose from the steam and grime whenever they let me — but you? Isn't this pretty far off your beat?"

"Oh, yes, it is, but I'm not on a beat at all. I'm out on other business," said Neddy dropping down on the bench at his old friend's side. "They told me if I came out here I'd find Senator Devon. But there don't seem to be anybody alive in this place but you."

"There isn't," answered Daddy Dan. "Got a special delivery for the Senator, eh? Didn't know that he dabbled in your stock. What is it, ribbons or feathers?"

"Oh, no — no," laughed Neddy; "it's nothing from Roreham's at all. It's my own private business, Daddy Dan, but I don't mind telling you about it. I came

out here to see if Senator Devon wouldn't get me a place as Senate Page."

"Oh! you're looking for that job, eh? I thought — I thought you were pretty well fixed."

"I am. I like Roreham's first rate and Griggs is the best kind of a fellow, and the bicycle-riding is fine. But, you see, it don't pay very well, Daddy Dan, and I ought to do better if I can. Griggs thinks so, and so does Bob Dixon. I'm not like other boys that have fathers and uncles and things. I've got a mother to take care of, Daddy Dan. And, gee! there's such a lot of things I want to do for her," concluded Neddy.

"What sort of things?" asked Daddy Dan, who was busy filling his pipe.

"Oh, all kinds," answered Neddy, who was leaning back comfortably against the big locust, his hands clasped over his head that was covered over with crisp, fair curls. "I'd like to get her a home, Daddy Dan,

not rooms, you know, but a real house-home in the country, where she could see the stars and skies, and have green things growing round her, and where the sun would shine in all the windows, big, nice, strong trees would stretch out their boughs and keep off the wind and storm. We were talking about it all the other night, and she told me what she would like best. And we would have roses climbing over the porch, and flowers everywhere, and little yellow chickens, and a cow. And I would have Mama wear soft white dresses all the time, without thinking of the washing, and have real cream for breakfast every day."

"You think with this page job you could manage all that?" asked Daddy Dan, slowly puffing at his pipe.

"Oh, no, not all at once," answered Neddy, "but Fred Rawlings says if you know how to work the ropes you get — pull."

"Oh, you do?" said Daddy Dan grimly.

"Fred says if you can get pull with a big man or two —"

"Who is Fred?" interrupted Daddy Dan rather sharply.

"Fred Rawlings, he is a page himself — he has just got in."

"A little red-headed cock sparrow with blinking eyes?" asked Daddy Dan.

"Yes," replied Neddy, recognizing the not very flattering description. "I've seen him," said his old friend gruffly, "and he is no good, Sonny. You're better off spinning on your wheel through the sunshine than following his lead. But," Daddy Dan paused to knock the ashes out of his pipe, "Devon might give a boy like you a better chance than that — I would, I know."

"Oh, yes, you would I am sure," said Neddy quickly. "I wouldn't have even to ask you for a job, dear old Daddy Dan. But then you're not a great Senator, with everybody bowing and scraping to you and trying to talk to you and no time to

think of a boy like me. I tell you it took all the pluck I had to come up here to-day; my heart was beating so loud I could almost hear it as I came in that gate. I felt like turning back and giving up. But I thought of Mama and the house under the trees and the white dresses — and I just set my teeth together, and bolted in to find — only you here, Daddy Dan, only you. Why haven't you been to see us again?" continued Neddy, clapping his old friend's shoulder. "Didn't we treat you all right, Daddy Dan?"

"You did, sonny, you did indeed. I haven't been treated so much to my liking this many a day. And — and," Daddy Dan paused for one of his low chuckles, "I don't mind telling you I've been about as shaky as you were to-day; worse, I reckon, for I've been to your door twice and turned away."

"Turned away? Oh, Daddy Dan, why?"

"Scared," answered Daddy Dan, with

another chuckle, "tough old leather hide that I am — downright scared, sonny. Couldn't get up nerve to face that pretty little mother of yours again. Thought, well — that she wouldn't like it."

"Oh, yes, she would, she would indeed," was the eager assurance.

"Sure of that?" asked Daddy Dan, flashing one of his piercing glances at his little comrade. "What did she say when I was gone. Out with it. Fair and square and honest, Sonny I — I won't mind. Wasn't it, 'That rough, clumsy old vagabond, why did you bring him here?'"

"Oh, no, no, *no,*" cried Neddy ardently. "She didn't, honest and truly, she didn't, Daddy Dan. She said just low and soft, 'Poor, lonely man! We must be kind to him, Neddy, just as kind as we can.'"

"Good," said Daddy Dan, his rugged face clearing wonderfully. "It's all right then, Sonny. I'll — I'll come again. And you'd better start for home now, before it

gets dark and she begins to worry about you. And if I were in your place, I don't think I'd strike Devon for that job until after Christmas. I hear they're driving him pretty hard over yonder," with a nod to the white dome in the distance, "and he is in a kicking temper just now."

"Oh, is he?" said Neddy. "I'm glad I didn't catch him, then."

"So am I," said Daddy Dan with a nod. "But after Christmas, well, I reckon, things will smooth out a bit. It's not long, only three weeks or so."

"I'll wait," said Neddy decidedly. "It's a great deal better to wait. Won't you come back to town with me, Daddy Dan? I've got an extra ticket."

"Thank you, Sonny, no. I'd rather tramp it for awhile longer out here in the sunset. Looks pretty over there, doesn't it?" with a wave of his hand to the far horizon. "Lord, Sonny, if we could only see things always like that, all white and

gold and sunshine. If we could lift them out of the smoke and soot and grime. But we can't, Sonny — keep up the steam as we may — we can't."

Daddy Dan had risen and with his old grey hat pushed far back on his head stood facing the dream city that seemed floating in the sunset, a strange, sad look in his deep-set eyes.

"Run home to your mother," he said suddenly, patting Neddy's shoulder. "Run home; it's getting late."

CHAPTER X

DOUBT AND DANGER

The first snow was falling in playful little scurries when Daddy Dan came again. His big hat and coat were so powdered with feathery flakes that he paused to shake them off at the head of the second stair.

The soft tinkle of a guitar came from Mrs. Ray's half-open parlor door. She was singing the old evening hymn:

Fading, still fading,
The last beam is shining.
Ave Maria.
The day is declining;
Safety and innocence
Fly with the light;

Temptation and danger
Walk forth in the night.
Ave Maria, audi nos.

The visitor at the doorway listened, his brown hand clenching the balustrade as if to steady himself, for that music brought back memories of a long-lost past and touched his heartstrings into tremors of unforgotten pain. He stood motionless in the shadow until the singing had ceased and then tapped at the door. Neddy greeted him with a jubilant shout of welcome.

"No, I won't come in to-night, Sonny," he said hesitatingly. "Come out with me and take a walk."

"Oh, yes, yes, if you don't mind, Mama," said Neddy gleefully. But his mother hesitated. It was one thing to have this doubtful acquaintance a safe guest at her fireside — it was another to trust her boy with him into the night of a great city.

"It is stormy, Neddy dear, and you are not very strong yet. Can't you persuade Daddy Dan to spend his evening here?"

"You're right, madam, you're dead right," was the visitor's quick reply. "If you don't mind a few snowflakes, I will come in for a minute or two. I heard you singing as I came up the stairs," he added as he took the chair Neddy pushed toward the fire. "It sounded very"— Daddy Dan paused as if vainly searching for a proper adjective, and concluded simply, "very nice."

"Oh, that is Neddy's favorite. I used to sing him to sleep with it in the long, long ago. It's an old, old hymn," said Mrs. Ray.

"Yes, I've — I've — heard it before," said Daddy Dan quietly.

"Then you must have been in our church, Daddy Dan. We're Catholics, you know."

"Are you? I sort of thought as much,"

said Daddy Dan, nodding. "No, I didn't hear the hymn in church, unless, as some folks say, the woods are the biggest church of all. I heard it there, when the sun was going down, and the trail through the forest was a blaze of golden light, and the music seemed to go with the rustle of the breeze, the chirping of the birds in the tree-tops, and all sorts of things soft and sweet."

"And who used to sing it, Daddy Dan?"

"My wife, Sonny," was the low answer.

"Oh, yes, yes," said Neddy, "I forgot. I told Mama about your wife and little baby and — we were so sorry for you, weren't we, Mama?"

"Yes, dear," said his mother gently. "But — but — there are sorrows that it hurts to talk about, you know, Neddy."

"Oh, I don't mind him, ma'am; we — we understand each other, don't we, Sonny? And somehow with that singing

in my ears I'd like to tell you about her, the little girl I left sleeping in the pine woods twenty years ago. She was such a little girl, my Kitty, scarcely eighteen, just out of a convent school, where the nuns had kept her since her mother died twelve years before. It was a rough, wild country where I found her blooming like a mountain pink, on the rocks.

"Her father had been fooled out there by some wild-cat deal and had brought her out with him, thinking he could make a fortune for both. A nice, soft-spoken gentleman, that knew no more of the seamy side of life than I do of the South African jungle, ma'am.

"I tried to brace him up to it — we had claims close together — but it was no use — he couldn't stand the racket and broke down.

"'If it were not for Kitty I could die easy, Dan,' he said; 'I was mad to bring her out here. I ought to have left her

with the nuns. If I could only see her in safe hands before I go, married to some good, kind man.'

"'We're a rough lot out here at the best,' I said, 'but I reckon I am as good as any of them. Will she have me?'

"'Aye, Dan. God bless you, she will,' he said. And the old Spanish padre came and married us beside her father's dying bed."

"And you were good to her, I know —" Mrs. Ray's soft eyes were shining with sympathy at her visitor's story.

"I tried to be, ma'am, I tried to be, God knows. I took her off to the hills and built a little cabin for her and made it as soft and warm as I could in that wild, rough place. She tried to do her best for me as she had vowed. She made and mended and cooked with those little white hands that had been taught to play on the harp and piano, while I kept on money-grubbing instead of taking her back where

she belonged. Then when the bitter winter set in and the snow was six feet deep in the mountain gulches, her baby came — and they both died. Ah! madam —" Daddy Dan's deep voice shook, "it was murder to have kept her there. I — I — ought to have been hanged."

"Oh, no, no," said Mrs. Ray, whose soft eyes were brimming at this crude but tender story. "You must not blame yourself; you were working for her, you know, only for her. Other women have borne the same hard life, the same trials. And sometimes I think they are happiest who die young. The world is so full of sorrows and heartbreak, it is good to be — safe in Heaven."

"You believe in Heaven, ma'am?" asked Daddy Dan, flashing one of his keen glances at Neddy's mother.

"Gee whizz! of course she does," interposed Neddy, before she could answer. "Don't you, Daddy Dan?"

"I'd like to, Sonny," was the slow answer; "I'd like to think there is a better world than this measly, cheating, cutthroat place we've got down here. But I don't know, I don't know. And all these sky-pilots of preachers I've heard seem to be at loggerheads with each other."

"Oh, no, our preachers are not at loggerheads, are they, Mama?" interrupted Neddy quickly. "You've been to the wrong church, Daddy Dan. There's only one real right one, you know; all the others get things mixed up. But we don't, Daddy Dan. Every priest in the world preaches the same thing and they've been preaching the same thing ever since Our Lord was on earth. If you go to church with me some day, you'll hear no loggerheading. Won't you let me take you to our church, Daddy Dan, please?"

"Some day, Sonny, some day maybe I will," was the answer.

"Then we'll go Christmas," continued

Daddy Dan's young missionary promptly, striking while the iron was hot; "that is the finest day of all."

And Neddy launched into a glowing description of Christmas celebrations, while Mama brought out the cookies from the little cupboard, and poured Daddy Dan his cup of tea, a growing pity in her heart for one who seemed to be walking such darkened ways.

"We'll convert him, Mama," said Neddy jubilantly when his guest had gone out again into the night. "He has promised to go to church with me Christmas Day. We'll show him there's a Heaven then, won't we, Mama?"

And Mama kissed her boy's fair forehead and felt that it was just such childish guidance that could lead Daddy Dan into the Light.

Neddy was late coming home next evening. The pink lamp had been burning for nearly half an hour, and Mama was begin-

ning to grow anxious about her boy, when he came bounding up the stairs and burst into the room, breathless with excitement.

"Oh, Mama, Mama," he cried, as he flung his arms about her neck, "poor Daddy Dan! poor Daddy Dan!"

"What is it, Neddy? Is he ill? You are trembling all over, dear. Oh, what has happened?" asked his mother, in dismay.

"They're going after him to-night, Mama, they are going to do something dreadful to him. I heard it all, Mama, I heard it all."

"Who, where — oh, what do you mean, Neddy, darling?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know," was the incoherent answer. "I only know he is in some awful trouble, Mama, and they're going to do him up somehow to-night. Oh, poor, dear Daddy Dan! I've got to save him, Mama, to help him."

"Yes, dear, yes," said his mother soothingly, while all her fears and doubts about

their strange guest started up afresh. "I was afraid there was something wrong about the poor man. Tell me, try to tell me quietly, what you heard, Neddy."

"It was in a big house on Capitol Hill, a sort of old-fashioned, shabby house, Mama. I went there with a special order. It was late and Mr. Mills told me it was all right for me not to come back.

"But the lady wasn't satisfied with the silk, and sent me word to wait. I sat down in the back hall — since that pretty lady lit into me so I always try to keep out of sight."

"Yes, dear, yes; stop and take breath, Neddy," said his mother, as the little narrator paused panting with excitement.

"There was a door half open, and some men inside drinking and smoking and talking fierce and angry, Mama. I couldn't help hearing, but I didn't pay much attention until some one said 'Daddy Dan,' and then, then I listened, oh, listened. For

they were saying such dreadful things about him, cursing and swearing about, about — oh, Mama, Mama," Neddy's voice broke into a sob, "I can't bear to tell you. They said he had killed somebody — killed their Bill."

"Oh, Neddy, Neddy, darling," Mama's face blanched, "are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, Mama, yes, I heard it plain. Poor Daddy Dan! poor Daddy Dan!"

"Oh, I always felt there was something wrong, that he was hiding, Neddy, something secret in his life, but — but I didn't think it was as bad as this."

"Oh, but maybe he couldn't help it," said Neddy eagerly. "Maybe it was a fair fight, Mama. I am sure it was. I am sure their Bill struck first and Daddy Dan couldn't stand that — he is too brave and fierce and strong. The men said that, too — that he was strong and would make a big fight, and that there would be hot work to-night, but they would be three to one

against him, and he couldn't stand that. And he can't, Mama, he can't you know. I must go tell him," and the speaker's little face kindled with resolve, "I must go tell him to run away. There's a night session at the Capitol, and I can catch him there before he quits work. And if you don't mind, I'll take him my Christmas money. I've got two dollars saved; it might help him to get off."

"Oh, Neddy, Neddy, darling, I'm afraid you are too little a boy, to get mixed up with desperate men," said his mother timorously. "Poor man! poor Daddy Dan!" continued the gentle speaker, her soft eyes filling. "He had such a good face, Neddy, so kind, so honest, so strong. To have killed some one! Oh, it seems too dreadful."

"Oh, maybe he really didn't do it, Mama, or maybe he couldn't help it. Poor Daddy Dan doesn't believe in Heaven, you know; he has never learned to think of

Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, like we do; he has never been in a real church. What is there to keep him from doing wrong? We mustn't blame him, Mama — we must just help him and save him if we can. Let me go, please, dear Mama, please."

And as Neddy flung his arms about her neck and she felt the hot tears on his young face, his mother's fears and doubts gave way.

"Go then, my dear, go and God bless you, my own true, brave boy." And with this gentle blessing echoing in his ear, Neddy sped on his way.

CHAPTER XI

A SURPRISE

It was a clear, cold night. His young pulses all a-throb with the excitement of his errand, Neddy hurried on through the wide streets, whose darkness was aglow with electric lights that seemed to rival the stars that were twinkling with frosty radiance in the blue vault above.

But the light did not reach Neddy's heart, for that was heavy with such gloom as had never touched its innocent depths before.

Poor Daddy Dan! lonely, friendless, homeless, perhaps even sinful, as he was, Neddy's only feelings were pity, loyalty and tenderness as he hurried on to warn and save his old friend. Nearing the Capitol, he was

conscious of a thrill of excitement in the air. The streets were unusually wide awake, the cars crowded, cabs and carriages were dashing forward toward the white dome that ablaze with electric splendor rose like a sunny dream palace from its terraced hill.

Neddy knew his ground well here. Very early in his career Mama, who could boast of heroic blood, had led her boy up to this fair Temple of Liberty and shown him all its pictures, its statues, its storied halls, its inspiration.

She had told him of the great-grandfather whose voice had echoed trumpet-toned through the Senate chamber, of the great-grand-uncle who had followed Perry's flag in Lake Erie, of an ancestor still further back whose bold signature was attached to the mighty "Declaration" that had made this Western world anew.

But Neddy had never seen the Capitol by night. Terrace and porticos, glittering

with moon-like globes of light, seemed stretching into bewildering distance, eager, hurrying crowds were pressing up the wide stairs. All was life, strange, dazzling life, as if the darkness had burst into sparkle and glow.

But with all this our little messenger had nothing to do. His business was not in those shining halls above, but down somewhere in the deep, dark recesses, where Daddy Dan kept up the steam. How to find the place was the perplexing question, for he felt the occasion demanded cautious inquiry that would awaken no suspicion among the guardians of the place, or of the law.

He was standing in the lower terrace, thinking the matter over, when a familiar figure caught his eye. It was Fred Rawlings, in his dapper page uniform, locked arms, with a couple of official comrades, all on the lookout for a lark.

"Fred!" hailed Neddy joyfully, "gee! I'm glad to find you."

"Neddy Ray!" exclaimed Fred, "why, where on earth did you drop from? Norris, Percy, this is my friend Neddy Ray, one of the good boys, who studies his catechism and says his prayers at night."

"And whose mother always knows when he is out," laughed Norris.

"Yes, she does," answered Neddy good-humoredly, "and I am out on special business to-night. Can you boys show me how I can get to the heating department? I want to find a man that works down there where they keep up the steam."

"Steam isn't in our line," said Fred loftily.

"Nor work, either," added Norris with a grin. "But still, Freddy, you ought not to turn a friend down. We might give him the tip, you know."

"A tip?" said Freddy, staring.

"Yes — the — the password, our pass-

word," and Norris nudged his mate's elbow and grinned again.

"Oh, yes, I — I — see," said Freddy, "the password, of course."

"You really can't pass the official lines without it," continued Norris to Neddy. "There's a big crowd to-night and we can't have any outsiders Paul Prying round. They might bring in a Russian bomb or two and blow up the whole business."

"Oh, I see," said Neddy innocently.

"You think if we give him the word, it will be all right, Freddy?" asked Norris doubtfully.

"He'll not peach on us for it?"

"Oh, no, no, indeed, never," interposed Neddy eagerly.

"Well, then, it's — it's 'Dinkspiddledun,'" said Norris gravely. "That is the Greek for official business. Just go up to the first guide you see and whisper 'Dinkspiddledun,' and he'll take you wherever

you want to go. You'll find one right up there in the first corridor."

"Oh, thank you," said Neddy. "It's very good of you to help me, and I'll never tell, you may be sure." And he sprang up the wide steps that led to the Senate wing, leaving the roguish pages chuckling gleefully at their joke.

"Lord! what a saphead you've got for a friend, Freddy. Why, he hasn't cut his milk teeth. 'Dinkspiddledun!' Let's steal up behind him and see who he tackles first, and how they take it."

"No, sir, I'm out of it," said the lad called Percy. "There are too many big bugs that won't stand fooling with around here to-night."

"Oh, come on, Freddy," said Norris. "You're not afraid. It's too good a joke to miss." But as Freddy, too weak to refuse, followed his naughty leader up the stairs, Norris, who had reached the broad portico, suddenly whirled around and

caught him by the arm. "Je-ru-salem jinks!" he gasped. "He has done it, sure enough. Bolt, Freddy, bolt, or our game will be up forever here." And they both scrambled like hunted rabbits out of sight.

For Fortune had favored Neddy. As he stood on the broad portico looking around for a guide, his eye fell on a tall, grey-coated figure standing in the shadow of one of the great pillars.

He stepped forward, but the foolish password died on his lips, in a low cry of recognition, "Daddy Dan —" the words came almost with a sob — "Daddy Dan!"

"Why, Sonny — you, you, here!"

"Oh, Daddy Dan, yes, yes, I came to tell you to go, to get away quick, quick." The words tumbled over each other in Neddy's excitement. "They're after you, Daddy; they are looking for you."

"Lord!" said Daddy Dan anxiously. "What is the matter, Sonny? You're not sick again, little boy?"

"Oh, no — no, but I heard such dreadful things to-day about *you,* Daddy Dan. I took an order to a house on Capitol Hill this afternoon and some men were there, three or four of them, talking about what they meant to do to you to-night. I heard all they said, and I came to tell you about it and beg you to get away before they can hurt you, Daddy Dan."

The words came in a breathless whisper, the little face upturned to Daddy Dan was sharp with eagerness and anxiety.

"Hurt me, Sonny! Come back here —" Neddy's old friend drew the trembling boy further back into the shadow. "Now, let us see if we can't get this story straight. Who is going to hurt me?"

"Oh, I don't know who they were, Daddy Dan, but they were swearing they would finish you to-night."

"Oh, they were, eh?" said Daddy Dan, with a grim chuckle. "Maybe I can take a hand in that sort of business myself."

"Oh, it wouldn't be any use," faltered Neddy. "They said they knew you'd make a fight, but they would be too strong for you, too many for you, Daddy Dan. Oh, won't you go, please, back to the mountains, back to Peek-a-boo right now. I've brought you my Christmas money — only two dollars, but it will help maybe, help you to get away. Take it, please, and go, oh, please, go."

"There, there — why, good Lord! you're not — not crying, Sonny?"

"Yes, I am, I am. I can't help it. I am so — so frightened for you, Daddy Dan. They said you — you — you had killed somebody."

"Killed somebody!" echoed Daddy Dan in fierce amazement.

"Yes, killed their Bill," said Neddy, struggling manfully with his sobs.

"Oh, little Sonny, little Sonny —" Daddy Dan drew the little messenger close to him, while his deep voice shook

strangely — "and you came here about that? Does your mother know?"

"Yes, she told me I could come to warn you, to save you, Daddy Dan."

"Told you to stick to me in spite of that, in spite of all?"

"Yes, yes, because I love you, I'd stick to you no matter what you've done. Only, go, please, go quick, for my sake. Take my money and go, please, please," continued Neddy, thrusting his two dollars in his old friend's hand.

"Sonny —" the strong arm tightened its hold and Daddy Dan's voice grew very soft and low, "don't worry; there's no need. You've got things a bit mixed. I'll explain it all to you and to your mother to-morrow. Just now, you can take my word for it I've done no harm, I haven't killed anybody, and there is no need for me to run away. You have nothing to fear for old Daddy Dan to-night. But all the same, you've done a good thing in com-

ing here to me, Sonny. You've steadied my grip. I was just standing here under the sky and stars wondering if that everlasting buzz and glare inside was worth while, if old Peek-a-boo wrapped in its mist clouds isn't a good deal finer place than this."

"Oh, no, Daddy Dan," answered Neddy with an uplifted look to the great white dome, "*no*. This is just the tip-top of everything."

"You think so, Sonny?"

"Gee whizz! — yes," replied Neddy. "When a fellow gets here, Mama says, and stands fair and square for the right, like my great-grandfather did, it's something grand.

"I can't expect to do that, of course, but if I had a father or uncle or somebody like other boys have, to help me on, you bet I'd make for the top just as I did that day with you on old Peek-a-boo."

"And you shall, by George! you shall,"

said Daddy Dan quite fiercely; then with a sudden change of tone, "I mean you've struck it, struck it dead, Sonny. This hill-top is worth the climbing, worth the holding, and to stand here fair and square for the right, though the winds blow and the storm bursts and a pack of hungry wolves are howling against you *is* worth while.'

"Now I must go back to work. Don't worry about me. Clip off quick as you can to that good mother of yours, and tell her matters are all right. I'll come around some time to-morrow and explain things to you and to her, Sonny. It's *all* right." Daddy Dan squeezed Neddy's hand in a parting clasp — "all right — "

And reassured by the strong, cheery tone, Neddy hurried away to relieve Mama's fears and anxiety by his return. He had not far to go, for as he pressed through the crowd gathered at the broad steps of the second terrace, a sweet, familiar voice called his name.

"Mama!" he exclaimed, springing to her side with an eager bound that nearly overturned a silken-robed Chinaman, who was making his stately way up the stairs. "Why, Mama, you here?"

"Oh, yes, dear, yes, I scarcely hoped to find you, but I got so nervous, and Miss Whyte had tickets."

"For reserved seats," said Miss Whyte who stood beside Mama in all the glory of her brown, wavy hair and a purple velvet bonnet. "Senator Devon sent them to Cousin Jane, and she is down with the grip and couldn't come. So she gave them to me — to hear the Senator's great speech to-night, my dear. I couldn't think of venturing out alone in such a crowd, so I persuaded your mother to come."

"And, oh, it's good to have met you, Neddy," said Mama, slipping her hand into her boy's. "I have been so worried. Have you seen — have you heard of — your friend?"

"Yes, Mama, and it's all right. He says there's no danger. I got things mixed up somehow. He's coming to-morrow to explain," said Neddy in Mama's ear, as they pressed on with the rest up the wide terrace stairs through the great bronze doors into the tesselated corridors, brilliant with light and life, to the Senate chamber, where he found himself wedged in by Mama's side, in the corner of a gallery that commanded the whole bewildering scene.

A blaze of light, bright as the noon-day sun upon the heights of Peek-a-boo, fell upon the stately room below where the Senate was in session.

Neddy had only a vague comprehension at first of the stirring picture before him. The wealth, beauty, fashion, and power of the Capital crowded the encircling galleries. Statesmen, soldiers, foreign diplomats,— elegant women gowned in the latest Parisian styles; fair young debutantes

and white-haired "society leaders" seemed to form a brilliant frame for the wide arena below, where every desk was filled and the ring of excited voices from side to side told that great opposing forces were already clashing and the battle was on.

"I really don't know what it's all about, my dear," said little Miss Whyte in a stage whisper. "Cousin Jane tried to explain it to me, but I couldn't exactly understand. Except this, that Senator Devon is standing as he always does for something that he believes just and right and there is a powerful party against him.

"They wanted a Bill put through Congress, he thought was not fair or honest, and he killed it, Cousin Jane says, and it has brought on a great political fight. There, there, he is rising to speak now —" little Miss Whyte's excited whisper was lost in the expectant murmur that swelled through the crowded galleries, as from a

desk that had been half screened by a tall bouquet of American Beauty roses bearing the dainty card of Miss Mildred Bond, the great Senator rose.

And Mama sat pale and breathless, while a low, startled cry burst from Neddy's lips.

For the tall, gaunt, rugged figure standing there in the fearless strength of a mountain oak as it breasts the storm, was "Daddy Dan."

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

Daddy Dan's quick ear must have caught that low, startled cry, for he flashed a swift upward glance at the galleries, a glance that swept over statesmen, soldiers, diplomats, over the rows of press reporters ready to catch his words, over the ranks of beautiful women bending forward in eager interest, over all the power and pride and wealth and rank gathered around him, and his eye rested on one little, boyish face — on Neddy standing bewildered and uncomprehending at his mother's side.

And all that was strongest, truest, best, in Daddy Dan's great mind and soul seemed to leap to meet that innocent questioning look of the little boy who loved him.

"Mama, Mama," gasped Neddy, "it's Daddy Dan speaking down there! It's — it's — *Daddy Dan!* — Mama."

"My dear, my dear," whispered little Miss Whyte in shocked reproof, "you must not give him that name here. It's the campaign cry in his own State, of course, but here he is always and only Senator Devon."

Senator Devon! "Daddy Dan" Senator Devon! The truth burst upon Neddy at last. His old friend and chum, comrade and confidant, whose rugged hand he had held, on whose strong heart he had leaned, was the great Senator whose name rang through the length and breadth of the land. Daddy Dan, the lonely old outcast of Peek-a-boo, the friendless guest on whom even gentle Mama looked with suspicion. Daddy Dan, whom he had come to warn of threats and danger, to-night was Senator Devon! The situation was too bewildering for Neddy. He could not real-

ize it. He could only sit there mute and breathless, vaguely conscious of some pain of loss in his young heart, while the familiar voice of his old friend rang in his ear, and Daddy Dan stood before him, the muffling great coat indeed thrown aside, but otherwise, his old, rugged, simple self, for Senator Devon did not follow style or fashion.

It was Daddy Dan's old eagle glance that swept that brilliant audience, Daddy Dan's tones that held it spellbound, as in fearless defiance, scathing sarcasm, his words poured forth like the mountain torrent, leaping over rocks and gorge, a flood of fierce, fiery, rugged eloquence that bore down the falsehood, trickery, and deceit reared against him, as if they were barricades of stubble and straw.

The speech was Senator Devon's masterpiece, the crowning triumph of his political career, and against all rules and precedents and cries of "Order," the audience burst

into applause that could not be restrained.

Little Miss Whyte split her carefully mended gloves to swell the handclapping. Miss Mildred Bond leaned over the balcony, glowing with exultant pride, even the impassive Oriental faces in the Diplomatic Gallery kindled into life.

Only Mama sat motionless, mute, with soft-flushed cheeks and starry bright eyes, understanding as Neddy could not understand, all that this meant to her boy, her trusting, simple-hearted little boy, who had given to Daddy Dan a love and loyalty that all Senator Devon's wealth could not buy, nor his power command.

And still feeling as if they were moving in a bewildering dream, Neddy and his mother went home, letting little Miss Whyte chatter on the way unconscious of the evening's revelations.

"Oh, Mama, Mama," said Neddy at last when they were safe in their own little nest, "I don't understand what it all

means. I can't understand, Mama. Why did Daddy Dan fool us so, why did he tell me such — such — stories?"

"I think if you will remember, Neddy, all the stories were true," answered his mother, with a smile. "Only, you did not quite understand them as he did. He told you his name was 'Daddy Dan,' and it *is* with those who think most of him in his own home State, in the rugged West; he told you he was working at the Capitol, keeping up the steam, and he does, dear, the steam of power that runs this great government; he told us he was lonely, friendless, homeless,— and I think, dear, with all his strength, his wealth, he has missed God's greatest and sweetest blessings, Faith and Love, and Home. And so he is poor, dear, for a man like Senator Devon knows there are things more precious than power and gold. And if he fooled you, or let you fool yourself, Neddy, I think it was because he found it so

strange and sweet to have a little boy love and trust him, not for his riches nor his power nor his name nor his place, but just as poor, lonely, friendless 'Daddy Dan.'"

And in her clear-seeing mother love Mama was right, as the next day proved. Early in the morning a big basket of roses bearing Senator Devon's card arrived by special messenger, with a note for Mrs. Ray.

"My dear Madam," it ran, "Daddy Dan is shaking in his boots with fear of your displeasure. If you do not forbid, he will come this evening to explain what perhaps may seem high treason to your kindness and hospitality. Sincerely yours,

Daniel B. Devon.

And as Mama did not forbid, Daddy Dan came — when the pink lamp was burning and the fire aglow. The same old Daddy Dan that Neddy had known, with no trace of the great Senator whose speech

of the previous night was in every paper in the United States this evening. It was just the same, plain, old Daddy Dan who shook Mama's hand as if the privilege were really more than he had a right to expect, and then, seating himself in the big chair, drew Neddy to his favorite perch on its side and began to explain briefly and bluntly.

"You could have knocked me down with a feather, madam, when I saw you and Sonny facing me last night. I did not mean you should find me out in that way; I intended to come to-day decently and make a clean breast of it. I don't know that I can make things plain to a gentle little woman like you, but when I took to the mountains last September, I was about as fierce and savage and cantankerous as a hungry catamount. That darned hay fever capped the climax with me, I suppose, but there was a deal more than that below. I was just done out with trickery

and treachery and lying and leg-pulling, if you will forgive the plain Western word, madam. I had been so badgered with flatterers and toadies, men, women and children cringing to me for money and influence and help, dirty scoundrels wanting to buy me and bribe me, and not a living creature in this whole world to care really whether I lived or died, except as it touched his or her interest — well, as I say, ma'am, the hay fever touched the button and I bolted for the mountains, to get away from the whole push, to breathe in air that wasn't heavy with selfishness and greed and deceit.

"And there — up in the old cabin at Peek-a-boo, where I was camping for a day or two, out of all reach as I thought, Sonny here tumbled in on me as you have heard. What sort of an old beggar, or tramp I was he didn't know or care, but he seemed to take to me right off. Lord! you can't imagine how it hit me, ma'am. To have a

little chap looking up at you with a pair of innocent blue eyes, offering to see you through a hospital scot free, or pull you into a five dollar a week job. And then the way he talked about you, madam, and how he had to look out for you — not whining or begging, as everybody did, from me, but just sociable and trusting — you can't think what it was to me, madam, something as if one of those hard, sun-baked plains over which I have sometimes ridden half mad with thirst, had been broken up suddenly by the sweet ripple of a mountain stream. It was so, so freshening, madam, that I pined for another draught, and so I came here meaning to stretch out a friendly hand to the little chap and help him on.

"But what I saw," continued Daddy Dan, his voice growing softer and lower, "what I saw here checked that hand. It seemed to me, to an old, grim fellow who had been standing for years like one of

those big bronzes they set up here in the Squares, high and lonely with all the flowers at his feet but beyond his reach, it seemed to me that little Sonny had here more than old Dan Devon with all his mines and ranches and stocks and bonds could give. It seemed to me that this love-lined little nest you had made for your boy was too safe, too pure, too sweet for me to stir or shake with a breath of change.

"And so I hesitated. I let you welcome me as old Daddy Dan, the doubtful, perhaps disreputable, Daddy Dan. It couldn't last long, I was sure. You were bound to find me out, but you can't tell what these stolen hours of simple love and childish trust have been to me, how they have made me see earth, aye and Heaven anew."

"I understand," said Neddy's mother gently. "I understood it all, I think, last night. And — we forgive you, don't we, Neddy?" she added, with her bright smile.

"Even for killing that Bill," said Daddy

Dan, stretching out his hand to clasp Neddy's, while his deep-set eyes twinkled. "Though there are many who would like to hang me for it yet, Sonny, still we downed them, I think, downed them last night. And I'll tell you a secret nobody knows. It was the sight of a little boy face in the gallery that fired me for the fight. I knew there was one little chap in that big staring crowd that loved me, trusted me, would stick to me in spite of judge or jury — and had brought his last Christmas dollar to help Daddy Dan out."

"And I'd never have done that if I had known you were a Senator, said Neddy simply. "But now — now we can be friends just the same — the same as ever — can't we, Daddy Dan?"

"Can't we?" echoed Daddy Dan. "You bet we can and will. Friends! Why, I'd throw up my job at steaming up things yonder to-morrow if it stood between you and me. Friends — always and

forever, Sonny," and Daddy Dan's strong hand tightened over Neddy's in a grip of steel.

. . . . . .

And friends always and forever they were, as Neddy wished.

Though Daddy Dan hated, as he said, to stir the dainty little nest under the eaves, it brightened visibly under his friendly touch. Neddy had never known such a Christmas, with real roses and violets filling the little rooms with summer fragrance, and Daddy Dan as Santa Claus longing to provide everything from a Canadian toboggan to an electric top.

And he went to church as he had promised, the dark, piercing eyes that watched the solemn service with grave interest softening wonderfully as they fell upon Neddy, in his red cassock and white surplice moving reverently around the radiant Christmas altar.

After Christmas Neddy went back to

school, for Daddy Dan found a place for Mama in a great Library, where she took care of books instead of sewing her pretty eyes out, and Aunt Livy came across the street to cook the dinner and wash the rosebud plates. And as the months went by and winter brightened into spring, Neddy had even pleasanter times with Daddy Dan, long walks in the country when school hours were over, climbs over the Maryland hills, merry half-holidays fishing in the river and creek.

It was on one of these gala afternoons Neddy found himself on well-remembered grounds. By a short cut through a belt of woods, Daddy Dan led to the terraced slopes of "Sunset View." But all had changed since Neddy's plucky effort to see Senator Devon here six or more months ago. The builder's scaffolding was down, the broad, quaint house stood embowered in bud and blossom, the great oaks that bent over it were green with fresh young

leaves; roses clambered over the wide porches, all was beauty and bloom. The sun was shining on every side — it was the very embodiment of Neddy's dream.

After he had raced delightedly over the little farm, where an honest Irishman had charge of barn and stable and poultry yard, Neddy flung himself down in the soft grass under the old locust where Daddy Dan, seated on the stone bench, was smoking his pipe, just as on that other afternoon six months ago.

"Well, what do you think of it, Sonny?" he asked.

"Oh, it's fine, it's the nicest place I ever saw, Daddy Dan. If I were you, I'd live here all the time."

"I'm thinking about it," answered Daddy Dan slowly, "Yes, I'm thinking about it, Sonny. Only it's a little lonesome, don't you think? Now if I could have a nice, lively young chap like you to keep me company he could have a pony in

the stable, all the dogs he wanted, and, well, pretty near everything he asked. How would you like the job?"

"Oh, but I — I — couldn't leave Mama," said Neddy quickly, though the "job" was a tempting one, we must confess.

"No, you couldn't, that's true, Sonny. I'm such a dull, blundering sort of fellow I don't know how to talk to her about it, but I thought, perhaps, if you should ask her —" Daddy Dan shook out his pipe and there was a queer tone in his voice — "if you should ask her, she might come, too."

"Mama come, too!" echoed Neddy in bewilderment. "Why, that would be fine, I'll ask her, Daddy Dan. I'll ask her tonight."

"Will you, Sonny? Tell her I've tried to ask her myself three times, but somehow I couldn't get it out. I thought maybe if you — you talked it over —" Daddy Dan's hand stroked the fair, curly head

that was close to his knee — "it might come easier — for both of us. So, perhaps, you'll go back into your old line of business once more, and take a special delivery to your little mother for me. Tell her you bring her Daddy Dan's heart, Sonny, with all that it means; that every beat of it is for her — and for you; that if she will take it and, well, let me be like one of these big old trees she talked of, a guard and shelter for you both, I will be the happiest man on earth."

Neddy's blue eyes opened in bewilderment for a moment — then he sprang to his feet and flung his arms about his old friend's neck.

"I understand, oh, Daddy Dan, I understand. And, oh, I'd like it, I'd love it better than anything in the whole world! I'd be your own boy then really and no one could ever cut me out. Oh, I'll ask her to-night."

And with this little special messenger

pleading Daddy Dan's cause, Mama could not say "No."

So it happened that a few months later there was a quiet little wedding at Father Maurice's rectory, and Neddy was "best man," and before fashionable Washington had recovered from the shock of surprise, Mama and Neddy were off with Daddy Dan for a trip to Europe, where they spent six wonderful months of delight. Neddy had never pictured such happiness in his wildest dreams.

"Sunset View" was waiting for them when they came home, and fashionable Washington trooped out in brilliant numbers to see Senator Devon and his bride. Even Miss Mildred Bond's disappointed and envious eyes could find nothing to criticize in the beautiful simplicity of the home or its dainty, gracious mistress, while Neddy, rosy and sturdy from his months of travel abroad, won every heart.

But though "Daddy Dan's" home must

necessarily be open to the great, the wise and the gay, the humble friends of old are not forgotten there.

"Cousin Jane" sews out at Sunset View for two happy months every year. Little Miss Whyte smooths her wavy brown hair for frequent visits to her "old friend," Mrs. Senator Devon. Tom Griggs always finds a hearty welcome. Bob Dixon and his mates troop out every half-holiday for exciting games of ball, tennis and golf. Aunt Livy rules with undisputed sway in the kitchen, and "Abe Linkum" wields hoe and rake with loyal pride on the spacious grounds.

Mama wears the soft, cloud-white gowns that Neddy loves, and roses are blooming not only in her belt, but in her cheeks.

And Neddy with a strong father hand to help him is making for "the top" as fast as a bright boy with the way opening clear before him can.

While "Daddy Dan," who has reached

the tip-top of things here below, is learning to look higher still. Gentle hands have guided him to the Faith — and beyond dome and spire and mist-veiled peak he sees the Heaven in which he believes and to which he *must* climb.

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